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W. J. TROWER, D.D.

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SIMILITUDES,

&c.

I.—THE EAGLE TRAINING HER YOUNG.

“ As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.”
Deut. xxxii. 11, 12.

THE care of the eagle for her young is here made an emblem of the Divine love and tenderness for the Church; as in another similitude, the hen gathering her chickens under her wings is an image of Christ's compassionate desire to shield the souls of His people from all the evil that can befall them¹. The eagle is observed to have a strong affection for her young; and to show it, not only as other creatures, by protecting them, and making provision for them, but also by educating them and teaching them to fly. She stirs them out of the nest with her beak. She flutters over them, not only with parental delight and complacency in her offspring, but also in order to instruct and encourage them by her own example to use their wings. She stirs them up, that they may not lie in sloth and indolence, or lose their natural gifts and powers for want of exercise; and then she

¹ Matt. xxiii. 37.

flutters over them that they may learn by degrees the right manner of exerting those powers. And as she helps them to rise out of the nest, and try their feeble strength, so she continually watches their endeavours, and turns back to them, if she sees them wearied or in difficulty; and she bears them on her own wings. How true to nature is each instance of her parental love, and each action of her instinctive wisdom, as here set forth to us! How beautiful is the image thus brought before us, of an eagle stirring up her nest, fluttering over her young, spreading out her wings, and taking and bearing on her wings her helpless offspring! She thus teaches and accustoms them to fly; and, by bearing them on her wings, protects them at her own risk from danger; since the body of the parent must then be pierced before the young eagles can be destroyed, or wounded. Surely every parent may well be reminded, by this description, of the duty of training and instructing his children; that he must not suffer them to grow up in idleness, and in ignorance of their blessings, and duties; or to lose their powers of mind, or body, for want of exercise.

But this most beautiful image is used to show us, in the first instance, the care with which God trained His weak and wayward people in the wilderness. When they would have continued in Egypt, He stirred them up with the love of liberty and the hope of "a land flowing with milk and honey;" and many times kept them from returning to that house of bondage. At every fresh difficulty He was at hand to counsel, to succour, and to comfort them; training them by degrees for what they had to do; and not leading them to struggles that would require strong faith and principle, and powers of enduring hardness, until they had been prepared for those greater trials, by mastering such as were more easy. With patient love, "He suffered their manners in the wilderness," and

² Acts xiii. 18.

led them about and instructed them, with the tenderness and forbearance of a compassionate Father.

And does not the similitude apply as truly to His dealings with ourselves? He graciously stirs us up at first by the influence of His Holy Spirit, by the warnings of conscience, by the fear of hell, and by the hope of heaven; or else we should never move from our old bondage to sin and Satan. He gives us the desire for the "glorious liberty"³ of His children who are freed from the tyranny of sin; and many times He keeps us from returning to our old condition, when, if left to ourselves, we should go back to it. In all the trials or disappointments which come upon us, He still seeks to train us for the heavenly home, as well as to exercise us for the work which lies before us on earth. And our part is, to remember at all times His gracious purpose towards us; that His Holy Spirit is, as it were, hovering over us; and that He is willing, as it were, to bear and carry us on His wings. Nay, we should call to mind that our blessed Saviour has Himself interposed between the Divine justice and our guilty souls; and received in His own body the stroke under which we must otherwise have perished for ever. Surely one thought of what is here said of the eagle stirring up her nest and fluttering over her young, and taking and bearing them on her wings, should be enough to sustain us under every dispensation of Divine Providence, with cheerfulness, and with a calm trust in Him who has so infinite a compassion for His helpless creatures. Remember, also, that He tells us of all this unspeakable tenderness, in order that we may be drawn to Him as with cords of love⁴; and that we may walk with Him in the ways of obedience, as grateful and teachable children.

³ Rom. viii. 21.

⁴ Hos. xi. 4.

II.—THE DIVINE DOCTRINE COMPARED TO RAIN.

"My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: Because I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness unto our God." Deut. xxxii. 2, 3.—See also Ps. lxxii. 6. Isa. lv. 10, 11. Mic. v. 7. Heb. vi. 7.

THE heart of man is often compared in Holy Scripture to the hard ground, which must be ploughed or softened before it can either receive the good seed, or can bring forth such herbs as the sower looks for in their season⁵. And as the heart is likened to the hard ground, so the Divine doctrine is compared to the softening rain or dew which the thirsty soil drinks in so eagerly⁶, and by which it is rendered fruitful. Or, perhaps, the Holy Spirit may be chiefly meant, which is elsewhere likened to rain or dew⁷, and by which alone the "doctrine" is made effectual in softening the hard heart. Accompanied by that gracious influence, the "doctrine" has a softening and penetrating power, sufficient to soften and subdue the hardest and proudest spirit. The heart is sometimes called a "stony heart⁸;" and the doctrine is then spoken of as "a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces⁹;" and elsewhere it is compared¹⁰ to "a two-edged sword, piercing, even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow." Its gentler influence is alluded to, when it is likened to rain or dew; more gentle, but not less powerful, than when it acts as a sword, or "as a fire¹," or as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces.

You may have seen the ground so hard and parched in summer that it might almost be taken for rock. It can be broken only by the most violent effort, and you would not think that it could ever be made soft again. Yet, when "a gracious rain" is sent upon it,

⁵ Luke viii. 5.⁸ Ezek. xxxvi. 26.⁶ Ps. cxliii. 6.⁹ Jer. xxiii. 29.¹ Jer. xxiii. 29.⁷ Ps. lxxviii. 9.¹⁰ Heb. iv. 12.

by degrees the hardness gives way. "He maketh it soft with the drops of rain²;" and it is again such as to receive into its bosom the seeds which shall bear fruit in due season. And thus has many and many a heart, which seemed "as hard as a piece of the nether millstone³," been softened and penetrated by the heavenly doctrine in due time. The man who seemed dead to all persuasion, and proof against all influence, has learnt to grieve over his sins, and to smite his breast with the most earnest conviction, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" He has learnt to reflect with amazement on those sufferings of our blessed Saviour, which were "nothing" to him⁴ before; his conscience has again become tender. The sense of shame, which seemed to be dead, has revived; and he reflects with remorse and confusion of face on the guilt which he has incurred, and the love against which he has sinned.

And the doctrine which has thus distilled like dew upon his heart, is the heavenly truth, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and that He hath committed unto His ministers the word of reconciliation⁵. To hear that there are waters in which the leper may wash and be clean⁶; and a door open for a return to pardon, virtue, and happiness; and a quickening grace which can quicken to a new life the man who was dead in trespasses and sins; these "good tidings of great joy" are the truths which fall upon the heart like showers on the mown grass, and like the dew upon the tender herb. How fitly are they thus compared! Think how blessed are the showers which, on some sultry day, come down when the rain has long been wished for! How gently and silently do they come down; how quickly do they penetrate; how eagerly are they drunk in! And

² Ps. lxxv. 10.⁴ Lam. i. 12.⁵ 2 Cor. v. 19.

A 5

³ Job xli. 24.⁶ 2 Kings v. 10.

when the sunshine has returned, every blade is glistening as with pearls, and a change of verdure is already seen. So does the heavenly doctrine fall upon the heart. Silently and gently it makes its way. When all else is hushed, it has "a still, small voice," to tell of mercy and hope. It comes from above. In moments of loneliness; in the silence of the evening hour; in the solemnity of Divine worship, or (it may be) in the chamber of sickness and sorrow, that dew comes down. The heart recovers by degrees the freshness, and (so to say) the verdure of its baptismal grace; and the signs of life are seen in the fruits of a holy conversation.

Daily should we seek this blessed influence from God upon our wearied hearts. And not only daily. God has graciously promised, as to His vineyard, "I will water it every moment⁷;" and in making this promise, He shows us what we need and what we should desire every moment. As a thirsty land drinks in the rain that cometh oft upon it, so should we ever be desiring and receiving the influence of Divine truth: remembering always that the only proof of our receiving it rightly, is the discharge of Christian duties with zeal and perseverance.

III.—A PRICE IN THE FOOL'S HAND.

"Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?" Prov. xvii. 16.—See also Matt. xiii. 44—46.

THE folly of those who live in sin is likened to the case of one who has the means put into his hand of procuring what he stands in need of, and yet from carelessness and stupidity continues to go without it. It is the case, for instance, of a miserable person, in rags and filth, who should have money given him

⁷ Isa. xxvii. 3.

wherewith to procure decent clothing; and yet from carelessness and indolence should go on as before; as ragged and miserable as ever. We might well say of such an one, Wherefore is there a price put into the hands of a fool to get what he stands in need of, seeing he has no heart to it;—he has no heart to try after a more decent way of life?

Wisdom is what we all stand in need of as “the principal thing⁸,” and indeed as “the one thing” that is really “needful.” And God has put into our hands a price wherewith to get it. Life, with all its blessings and opportunities, is the “price” or means which God has put into our hands, that we may procure the wisdom, whereby we should become wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus¹⁰. If we do not spend our life and use its various opportunities in procuring this necessary treasure, then we are like the fool who continues in his rags and filth, though the money wherewith to procure decent clothing is actually put into his hands.

The opportunities which God has entrusted to us for acquiring Divine wisdom are such as to leave us without excuse if we neglect them. He has given us souls which are capable of reflection, choice, exertion, and improvement. He has placed us in circumstances which are admirably suited to train and discipline us. When man had disabled himself by sin from using his natural powers, He made provision for restoring us to freedom and virtue, by the gracious covenant which He made with us in Jesus Christ; and He has brought us by baptism into His holy Church, and within the reach of her wise instructions and her continual consolations. He has given us His holy Scriptures, and His blessed sacraments, and His appointed ministry to counsel and direct us.

Why is it that so many who are possessed of all these advantages for gaining Divine wisdom, fail to

⁸ Prov. iv. 7.

⁹ Luke x. 42.

¹⁰ 2 Tim. iii. 15.

avail themselves of them? The reason is that they have "no heart to it." They have no heart nor desire for the great treasure itself, nor for the pains which must be taken in acquiring it. When they hear of the noble freedom which is the gift of Heavenly Wisdom to her children—its calmness, its healthfulness, its dignity—they see in it nothing that is attractive. It seems to them harsh and stern. Its strictness, severity, and patience, seem to them repulsive. The Apostle indeed tells us that Christ is made unto us wisdom¹; but the poor "fool" (so Scripture speaks of all who walk by sense, in the sight of their own eyes) sees in Him no beauty that he should desire Him². He has "no heart" to the Cross, the crucifixion of sin. He loves darkness rather than light, the folly that is natural to him more than the wisdom that is from above. He cannot bear to sacrifice his sloth, and lusts, and passions; nor to continue day by day in the paths of prayer and self-denial. And so it comes to pass that the "price" which was put into his hands is useless so far as he is concerned. He might as well not have had it;—nay, it would have been far better for him never to have had it,—than to have had it, and turned it to no account.

Give me grace, O Lord, to "buy the truth, and sell it not³." Let me buy it at the sacrifice of carnal ease, and selfish pride, and the love of any forbidden indulgence. Let me not sell it for all that this world can give, or Satan may offer. Let me value rightly the opportunities of this day of life which will so soon be over; and give me "an understanding heart"⁴ to use those precious opportunities to good purpose.

¹ 1 Cor. i. 30.

³ Prov. xxiii. 23.

² Isa. liii. 2.

⁴ 1 Kings iii. 9.

IV.—THE HORSE RUSHING TO THE BATTLE.

"I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle." Jer. viii. 6.—See also Prov. xxix. 1.

How the horse rusheth to the battle is described in the book of Job. "Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils is terrible. He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men. He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet. He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting⁵."

Thus does the foolish sinner rush blindly into danger. He is warned of the peril that might overtake him at any moment; but he mocks at the warnings which he receives. He is visited with Divine judgments which are intended to awaken him to a sense of his true condition: but he will not believe in the reality of that solemn account which he will have to give, and that sure destruction which is the end of the course that he is taking. He will not be persuaded to turn back; but led onwards by excited feelings and ungoverned passions, he blindly rushes into whatever is calculated to weaken the little hold which reason and conscience still have upon his conduct.

God has endowed us with the gift of reason that we may consider our ways and turn our feet unto His testimonies⁶. Learn we then that we "speak aright,"

⁵ Job xxxix. 19—25.

⁶ Ps. cxix. 59.

when, reflecting on our past transgressions, we say, "What have I done?" And as God is graciously pleased to hearken for these words of repentance and self-accusation, let us turn to Him without delay; and henceforth "walk circumspectly; not as fools, but as wise:" with a due concern for the great alternative, eternal life, or endless misery.

V.—THE SUDDEN LIGHTNING.

"As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Matt. xxiv. 27.
—See also Zech. ix. 14. Luke xvii. 24.

THE sudden flash, which brings so near to us the thought of an awful power that might consume us in a moment, should remind me of my Saviour's coming; which He has Himself compared to the lightning that cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west. He came at first "in great humility;" and many years passed by before He "manifested forth His glory," that His disciples should believe on Him. But when He shall come again, He will be seen "in the clouds of heaven." "Every eye shall see Him, and they also who pierced Him⁷." From one end of heaven to the other, His presence will be made manifest; and His coming will be as sudden as it will be terrible to the wicked. He will consume "that Wicked" with the spirit of His mouth, and destroy him with the brightness of His coming⁸.

We are wise if we accustom ourselves to see the lessons and warnings of that great event in whatever may serve to remind us of it; in the swelling buds¹ which indicate the approach of summer; as well as in the sudden lightning which speaks to us of Divine judgments. If we "discern the face of the sky"

⁷ John ii. 11.

⁸ 2 Thess. ii. 8.

¹ Rev. i. 7.

² Matt. xxiv. 32.

by the natural signs of foul weather or fair; we know that we shall be justly condemned, if we discern not "the signs of the times"; and a devout mind will see such "signs" in many and many an event or object, which is unnoticed by the worldly and the careless.

VI.—THE AXE LAID TO THE ROOT OF THE TREES.

"And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire." Matt. iii. 10.—See also Isa. v. Matt. xxi. 19, 20. Luke xiii. 6—9. John xv. 6.

THE Church of God is often likened to a vineyard or garden of fruit-trees, from which the owner looks for fruit in due season; and too often finds none. He is unwilling, however, to relinquish his hope of a return for all his labour; and continues, year by year, to prune, with the greatest skill, as well as patience, the plants which so ill repay his toil. At length he determines to lay the axe to the root of the unfruitful trees. He will no longer satisfy himself with lopping off the luxuriant branches, but will cut down the trees themselves, which only cumber the ground. In the parable of the fruitless fig-tree, the owner of the vineyard is represented as saying to the dresser of the vines, "Lo! these many years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none; cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" However high and stately may be the tree, and however green and luxuriant its foliage, the time comes when the owner is tired with waiting for fruit, and trying the effect of only cutting off branches; he determines that he will lay the axe to the root, and remove the tree itself from the ground which might be so much better filled.

Thus had God waited, for many generations, in the

² Matt. xvi. 3.

hope (so to speak) that the Jewish nation would at length yield the fruits of righteousness and true holiness, before He resolved to remove it from its place. He had tried with them one means after another, but all in vain. He had, as it were, pruned the trees by many a sharp infliction, and cut off many an unfruitful branch, while He still withheld His hand from felling the trees themselves. "What more," He says, "could have been done to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes³?" At length the time came when He resolved to remove the trees out of their place; to take away from the Jews the kingdom of God, and give it to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof⁴. The axe was to be laid to the root of the trees. We know how fearfully the event, thus figuratively described, was accomplished, when the temple was burnt, and the city taken by Titus, the Roman general; and how afterwards when the nation rebelled against their conquerors, Jerusalem was utterly destroyed by Hadrian, and the miserable people who survived were sold in vast numbers as slaves.

Thus the time will come with every "unprofitable"⁵ servant of God, when the patience and forbearance of God will be at length exhausted, and instead of trying any longer the effect of His fatherly chastisements, He will issue the awful sentence, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" In the parable already alluded to, we find indeed that a respite was granted to the fruitless fig-tree at the intercession of the dresser of the vineyard; who said, "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it; and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." Which of us can tell how often, when the axe was laid to the root, and the sentence for his removal was about to be executed, he

³ Isa. v. 4.⁴ Matt. xxi. 43.⁵ Philem. 11.

may have owed another precious period of probation to the intercession of his gracious Saviour? Who has not too much reason to own that he is a mere cumberer of the ground, ill repaying the continued care of the Heavenly Husbandman, and taking up room in the vineyard, which might be occupied far more to the glory of God, and far more usefully to man? How often has God as it were pruned or chastened us, with the hope that we might at length bear the fruits which He looks for! Let us beware, lest we provoke Him at length to lay His axe to the root. It may yet be "well" with us in time, and in eternity, if we use to good purpose the interval which is won for us by the mediation of our blessed Intercessor; but if we neglect this opportunity, as we have neglected so many before, it is too likely that He may refrain from pleading for us again. If it bear not fruit, "then after that thou shalt cut it down." Remember that what He wants is fruit, not leaves: and that however rich may be the foliage, in other words however high the profession, it is utterly worthless in His sight, if there be not the true fruits of repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.

VII.—BREAD CAST UPON THE WATERS.

"Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days."
Eccles. xi. 1.—See also Isa. xxxii. 20. Prov. xi. 25. Matt. x. 42.
2 Cor. ix. 8—10.

It is said (see Sir John Chardin's note on Isa. xxxii. 20, quoted by Bishop Lowth) that in eastern countries, where rice is cultivated as a principal article of food, it is sown upon the waters, and that before sowing it, they cause the ground (while still covered with water) to be trodden by oxen, horses, and asses, which go mid-

leg deep. This is the way for preparing the ground for sowing; and as the rice is sown on the water, so it springs up through the water, and the height of its stem is generally in proportion to the depth of the water on the surface of the soil.

It seems probable, that the preacher alludes to this, or some similar mode of sowing the grain which is used for food, when he bids us cast our bread upon the waters; assuring us that we shall find it after many days. He is evidently enforcing a liberal distribution of our worldly goods to the relief of our poorer brethren; and he encourages us to distribute freely, by reminding us that the seed (or bread) which is cast by the sower on the waters, is not lost; but bears its fruit in due season. It seems indeed to be lost. It seems an act of waste and folly, for such as can ill afford to suffer any loss, to cast their precious grain upon a marshy ground, or on what appears to be only a sterile plain of water, in which the good seed must perish. "After many days," however, the bright green of the tender plant is seen above the watery waste; and the sower finds his bread with abundant increase.

Thus it is, that in the eyes of an unbelieving world it seems "waste" and loss to expend in the relief of strangers, or for the spiritual benefit perhaps of the unconverted heathen, the money that has been painfully earned and laid up for coming years. To such it seems waste and folly to expend more than is absolutely necessary in the erection of churches; and when an earnest and reverent piety is anxious to distinguish the house of God from common buildings, by whatever may render it less unworthy of its sacred purpose, we too often hear a censure cast on what is termed an useless expenditure. We should learn that nothing is wasted or lost, by which relief is administered to the sorrows and sufferings of our brethren, or by which a reverent and instructed zeal delights in show-

⁶ Mark xiv. 4.

ing forth the praise and glory of God. Whatever is thus expended, is indeed like the seed cast upon the waters which is found after many days. The relief which you gave in secret to a stranger, whom you never thought of seeing again, shall be blessed not only to him, but still more surely to yourself. You shall find it after many days. And the same may be said of the word of good advice, which you gave "in season" to some one with whom you chanced to have brief intercourse; or the prayer which you offered for him; or the endeavour which you made to comfort him in his grief. Nothing of all this is lost or wasted. Still less shall any effort fail of due fruit, by which you have shown forth your love to Christ your Saviour, your affectionate reverence for His Church, your sense of the value of immortal souls. Every such instance of faith and love shall sooner or later be "found" to your exceeding joy; and in some unlooked for manner shall spring forth, to your unspeakable comfort. Be diligent in thus sowing beside all waters, or (however unpromising may be the risk) in casting your bread upon the waters. Be afraid only of losing an opportunity of doing good.

VIII.—THE POTTER.

"The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel." Jer. xviii. 1—6.—See also Job x. 9. Isa. xlv. 9; lxiv. 8. Rom. ix. 21.

THE prophet was commanded to observe the potter while engaged in his humble work, in order that he might learn a lesson of the Divine Sovereignty and

power, and be the better able to teach it to his countrymen.

When the potter takes the clay into his hands, he has the most absolute power over it, to mould it as it may seem good unto him. Whether it shall be moulded into some noble and graceful form, or into a mean and comparatively worthless vessel, depends entirely on his own pleasure. Who can blame him, if he be pleased to fashion it either to honour, or to dishonour? Or if he should change his purpose concerning the clay that is in his hands, even while he is in the act of moulding it, the form and purpose of the vessel which he is fashioning, may be changed in a moment, according to his will and pleasure. Or, if the vessel is marred under his hands, he makes it at once into another vessel; nor can any one question his right to deal with it, in such a way as his own sense of what is fitting may lead him to adopt.

This similitude is often used in Holy Scripture; because it helps us to understand our own meanness, and the Divine Sovereignty. We are as clay in His hands. He formed us of the dust; and He had the most absolute right to form us as vessels to honour or to dishonour, and to endue us with powers of mind and body of such extent, capacity, and efficiency, as might seem good unto Him. He had a right to determine the duration and conditions of our being, to appoint the bounds of our habitations, and all the circumstances on which our happiness and welfare in any degree depend. He was pleased to create man in His own image as a vessel unto honour; a little lower indeed than the angels, but still endued with noble faculties, and crowned with dominion over the other works of His hands on the face of this lower world. And when man "marred" this Divine image and beauty by his own sinful folly, God had the most absolute right either at once to "dash him in pieces as a potter's vessel," or to continue his existence, and appoint him a new probation, on such conditions as He might see

fit to enjoin, with whatever advantages, or disadvantages, He might be pleased to assign.

And as He had so sovereign a right to mould and fashion us at the first, according to the counsel of His own will, and again at the fall of man to renew our hope of honour and immortality on such conditions as seemed good to Him, so has He still the most absolute right to appoint whatever relates to our condition in life, and the most complete power to lengthen or to shorten our days, to bring us to honour, or dishonour. As in one turn of the wheel the potter may change the form of the vessel that is wrought upon it, so by one providential dispensation He can in a moment raise us from the lowest condition, or can humble us and bring us to nothing even from the highest.

These solemn truths are brought before us in order that we may meekly adore His sovereignty, and fear His almighty power, and humble ourselves before Him, with the deepest sense of our own insignificance and dependence, and trust implicitly in His majesty and mercy. We are not only as clay in His hands, but as vessels that have been "marred," and (by our own folly) have become unworthy of the honour and happiness for which we were originally intended. Yet, by His unspeakable mercy, He has put us into a condition in which (if it be not our own fault) we may regain the high estate from which we have fallen. "If a man therefore purge himself from these (these sinful lusts and habits), he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared for every good work'." How thankful should we be that, of His infinite grace, He has restored to us the capacity and the means of thus recovering from our sin and misery! and how continually should we bear in mind our natural nothingness and helplessness! What are we but "potsherds of the earth," frail and broken vessels, which may at

any moment be crushed to powder⁸? Shall we presume to strive against our Maker⁹, and murmur at His appointments or resist His will? It is foolish and wicked enough to strive with our fellow "pot-shepherds of the earth;" but how utterly unequal, as well as wicked, is such a strife against our Almighty Maker and Supreme Disposer of all events! He has said that every knee shall bow to Him; and we know also that it is said¹, that His Son shall hereafter rule with a rod of iron those who will not now submit themselves to His sway, and shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. How suitable then is the Psalmist's instruction, "Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings; be learned, ye that are judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and so ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him!"

IX.—SLEEP.

"Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Eph. v. 14.

"And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." Acts vii. 60.—See also Ps. xiii. 3. Rom. xiii. 11. 1 Cor. xv. 51. 1 Thess. v. 10.

AN impenitent sinner is said both to be "asleep" and also to be "dead." He is "dead," because his soul is destitute of spiritual life; but inasmuch as it has a capacity for receiving that spiritual life, he is likened also to one who is "asleep."

A man who is buried in sleep is unconscious of all that is going on around him. His mind is entertained indeed with dreams, which for the time he takes for realities; while the real and important business of life

⁸ Matt. xxi. 44.

⁹ Isa. xlv. 9.

¹ Ps. ii. 9.

is totally unheeded and neglected by him. Matters which affect his interest, or even his life, may be transacted around him, while he is dreaming on ; and when he awakes, he will find how material it would have been to him to have resisted the drowsiness in which his faculties for the time were lost. The ship is on the point of being engulfed in the raging waves, but Jonah is fast asleep². The building may be in flames, or the thief may have broken through the house, but the owner sleeps on in total ignorance of his danger, or his loss, until it is too late to escape the one, or to prevent the other.

Thus is it with the man who lives only for the things of time, and sense. The judgments of God are far above out of his sight³ ; and all the realities of the unseen world have no hold whatever on his mind ; no evidence, or substance⁴, in his judgment. The business, or pleasures, of life, in which he is wholly occupied, and which he takes for realities, are as the merest dreams and shadows, compared with all those mighty truths of which he is wholly unconscious, although as deeply concerned in them as any others. Great things are going on around him ; but his eyes are shut, and he cannot see them. Angels are rejoicing over penitents ; souls are being quickened from the death of sin ; the Spirit of God is changing many a desert into a garden of the Lord ; the Church is coming up out of the wilderness, while the poor foolish sinner is buried in a deep sleep, following with eager desire the merest vanities, and shadows, and knowing nothing of the danger which is ever hanging over him, or of the bright inheritance which he is forfeiting, for want of taking the necessary pains to gain it. Such is the state of every soul by nature ; and it is of God's great mercy that we are roused from this stupid sleep, and spiritual insensibility. He sends His ministers to say to each

² Jonah i. 5.³ Ps. x. 5.⁴ Heb. xi. 1.

of us, as the mariners said to Jonah, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, and call upon thy God;" or, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." How loath are we for the most part to be disturbed and to rouse ourselves! how fond are we of our vain dreams! how slow to believe in their vanity, and to open our eyes to what is true and real! When the word comes to us, "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?" How often do we plead, "Yet a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep!" And thus it is that poverty (the poverty of a soul destitute of true riches) comes upon us as one that travelleth, and want as an armed man.

It is not only spiritual death, however, (or sin,) which is compared to "sleep." The common natural death of the body is likened to it likewise. The dead are said to "sleep in the dust⁵;" and more especially all those who have departed this life in the faith and fear of God, are said to "sleep in Jesus⁷." The state of an impenitent sinner is compared to sleep, to show his supineness, indolence, and darkness; but the state of departed saints is compared to sleep, because "they rest from their labours," and because, also, they will have a glorious and blessed awakening from their sleep in the morning of the resurrection. How blessed is the thought, which is thus suggested to us, of the perfect rest which remaineth for the people of God, after all the troubles and temptations of life; and also of that bright morrow, when they shall awake up in the likeness of God, and be for ever satisfied with it⁸!

When I lie down to take rest in sleep⁹, let me think both of that sleep of the soul which is sin, that I may pray to be awakened from it, and also of that last sleep of which our sleep every night is an image

⁵ Prov. vi. 9.

⁶ Dan. xii. 2.

⁷ 1 Thess. iv. 14.

⁸ Ps. xvii. 15.

⁹ John xi. 13.

and similitude, that I may pray to be prepared for it. As I know not any night that I may ever again open my eyes on this world, let me so close them, as I should wish to close them, if I were sure that I had taken leave of the world for ever, with a humble hope that the sins of which I repent may be pardoned through Jesus Christ, and in perfect charity with all men.

X.—THE BIRDS BUILDING NEAR THE
SANCTUARY.

“How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God.” Ps. lxxxiv. 1—3.—See also Ps. xxvii. 4.

THE Psalmist is generally supposed, says Bishop Horne, in this passage, to lament his unhappiness in being deprived of all access to the tabernacle or temple; a privilege enjoyed even by the birds, who were allowed to build their nests in the neighbourhood of the sanctuary. It is evidently the design of this passage to intimate to us, that in the house and at the altar of God, a faithful soul finds freedom from care and sorrow, quiet of mind and gladness of spirit, like a bird that has secured a little mansion for the reception and education of its young.

We read, that “as a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place¹.” And the proverb may be applied to those who restlessly leave the place which Providence has assigned them, and thereby so greatly lessen their opportunities of usefulness. But as the Psalmist considers “the swallow,” or “the sparrow,” especially favoured,

¹ Prov. xxvii. 8.

which have found a place where they may lay their young near the sanctuary of God, so, in the figure of a bird that wandereth from her nest, we may chiefly see the similitude of some unhappy wanderer from the ways and worship of God, who must utterly perish, unless he be enabled to return to the happy home from which he has erred and strayed. When I see such a wanderer along this world's broad highway, let me earnestly and affectionately endeavour to lead him back to the "place" of peace and safety; and may the sight of any bird flying eagerly to its home remind me of the blessedness of living near to God! Still may my feet be found in the way to His earthly courts at every due season of divine worship; still may I find strength and refreshment under the burden and heat of the day in the thought of that blessed communion which is there chiefly enjoyed; and may I at length dwell all the days of my life in the house of the Lord, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple!

XI.—THE BULLOCK UNACCUSTOMED TO
THE YOKE.

"I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God." Jer. xxxi. 18.—See also Lam. iii. 27. Hos. x. 11. Matt. xi. 29, 30.

AN untamed heifer, that has never yet been put to the yoke, rebels against its master's will. It will not submit its neck to the restraint which he wishes to lay upon it, nor put forth its strength in drawing the burden which its companions at once undertake. Though fed and kindly treated by its owner, it struggles for a long time against his endeavours to bend its stubborn will; and if it be chastised, it becomes only the more furious in kicking against the pricks. We know, indeed, that it will at length be tamed, and forced to

submit itself as willingly and patiently as the other heifers that have been "taught;" and therefore we smile at its vain resistance, and think how much it would escape, if it would at first receive willingly what it will soon be afraid to struggle against. For the time, it often gains its way, and perhaps seems to triumph in being turned loose into the pasture, while its companions toil at their accustomed task.

It is a picture to us and a type of every sinner who strives against God. The commandments of God are a yoke upon our corrupt will, and lawless passions. This yoke is "not grievous," to those who bear it early, and who are accustomed to bow their necks to it. But it seems intolerable to such as have never been "taught" that true happiness and liberty are to be found in self-restraint, not in self-indulgence. The rule of Scripture for finding real enjoyment in life, is this²:—"He that will love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:" that is, let him "bridle his tongue;" let him seek the enjoyment of life in restraining (and not in giving way to) his natural inclinations.

Now this seems an intolerable bondage to the carnal heart, which, while it dreams of liberty from all restraint, is riveting, day by day, the chains by which it is enslaved to its tyrannous passions. It therefore struggles long and obstinately against that blessed yoke which Christ calls us all to take upon us; inviting us in those gracious words, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls, for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

How long do we resist His holy will, although we owe to Him the unnumbered mercies which are daily vouchsafed to us! If He chastens and corrects us for our good, we are too often but the more rebellious;

² 1 Pet. iii. 10.

and our proud hearts rise as stoutly against the humbling doctrines of His grace, as our stubborn necks refuse to submit themselves to the yoke of His commandments. The struggle is unspeakably vain and foolish; for He can at any moment bring us to nothing; and we must at last be the monuments of His terrible power, if we be not first the willing subjects of His grace. They are the wisest and the happiest of the sons of men, who accustom themselves from the first to this yoke of self-restraint. To a great extent, religion must always be a yoke and a restraint upon our corrupt will; but those who are most accustomed to it, find it most easy, and the burden which Christ lays upon them becomes daily more light. They are even able to say, "I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou hast set my heart at liberty³." And they find how truly it is said, "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth;" that he be early trained to give up his will to the will of others, and to find true freedom in submitting himself to the truth.

XII.—THE ANCHOR OF THE SOUL.

"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast."
 Heb. vi. 19.—See also Ps. cvii. 30. Eph. iv. 19. James i. 6.

THIS world is likened in the prophetic Scriptures⁴ to the sea. Being full of changes and chances, uneasy cares and restless desires, it is fitly compared to the sea, which is ever restless; treacherous in its smiles; swept by frequent tempests; full of hidden rocks and quicksands, which are the ruin of many a "gallant ship⁵." The Apostle speaks of some "who make shipwreck concerning faith⁶;" and thus we see that the Church of God has to cross these

³ Ps. cxix. 32.

⁵ Isa. xxxiii. 21.

⁴ Dan. vii. 3.

⁶ 1 Tim. i. 19.

wild and stormy waves before it can reach "the haven where it would be." We may remind ourselves, too, that the ark of Noah, borne up in safety above the waters of the flood, was a type of the Church of Christ; and thus, when a child is admitted into the Church by baptism, a prayer is offered, that it may be received into that true ark; and, "being stedfast in faith, joyful through hope, and rooted in charity, may so pass the waves of this troublesome world, that it may finally come to the land of everlasting life'."

As then the Christian has to cross a sea which is so full of hidden rocks, and so much exposed to tempestuous winds, he is provided with an anchor which may help to save him from making shipwreck, and from being the sport of many a storm that would otherwise drive him up and down⁸, without any sure knowledge of the course which he ought to take. This anchor is the hope which is set before sinners in Jesus Christ. The Apostle speaks of himself as having fled for refuge to lay hold of "the hope set before us;" and of possessing this hope as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast.

The hopes which this world sets before us are altogether vain and uncertain. They cannot make us stedfast in our course, for they have themselves no better resting-place than the ever-fluctuating waves. But the hope which true religion sets before us is made fast to the throne of God. This anchor is cast where nothing can unsettle it, even "above the water-flood, where the Lord remaineth a King for ever."

A man who hath this anchor, which is thus sure and stedfast, is not unduly elated or excited by worldly prosperity, though it should pour in like a full tide; for heavenly hope still shows him the brightness of that promised inheritance, in comparison of which all

⁷ Office of Holy Baptism.

⁸ Acts xxvii. 27.

other things are poor and mean. He is able also to look calmly forth upon the threatening waves around him; since, amidst all the changes and chances of this mortal life, his heart is there surely fixed, where true joys are to be found.

Those who "make shipwreck concerning faith," are such as lose their hold upon this anchor of the soul. They fix their dependence on other hopes, which snap asunder with the first storm, and leave them to contend helplessly with the winds and waves. How many a "gallant ship" is thus driven upon hidden rocks, or engulfed in the fatal whirlpool! In the morning it ploughed the sea in the pride of a vain and presumptuous confidence; in the evening it is only a wreck upon the waters. Be warned by such examples of the vanity of any worldly hope or dependence; and learn to prize more highly, and to depend more singly upon, that only anchor of the soul which is sure and steadfast.

XIII.—THE STARS OF LIGHT.

"And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be." Gen. xv. 5.—See also Ps. cxlviii. 3. Dan. xii. 3. Heb. xi. 12.

As the Sun is the Scriptural emblem of Christ the Sun of Righteousness⁹, so all the other heavenly bodies, and the heavens also themselves, are spoken of in Holy Scripture in illustration of spiritual facts. In the vast space and the boundless height of heaven, the Psalmist saw an image of that infinite love which compasseth all things living, but especially such as fear God, and of that unwearied mercy which is ever ready to listen to the prayers of the penitent. "As

⁹ See Similitude xxviii. First Series.

the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us¹."

The number and glory of the stars, their order and stedfastness in their courses, seem to suggest the countless multitude, and the godly order and stedfastness, as well as the future glory, of the children of God. Thus, when God made known to Abraham that he was to be the father of a countless progeny (the father of the spiritual Israel as well as of Israel after the flesh), "He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be." Thus also we find that false teachers are called "wandering stars²;" and it is therefore implied, that the stars which are fixed and stedfast in their courses, are the emblem³ of faithful pastors, who are "burning and shining lights."

Thus also when St. Paul is setting forth the glorious resurrection of the bodies of the saints, he compares the difference between their present condition and the various degrees of glory in which they shall arise, to the difference between "celestial bodies" and "bodies terrestrial," and also to the different degrees of splendour and brightness among the heavenly bodies themselves. "There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead⁴."

Thus, "when I consider, O Lord, Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained;" my first thought should indeed ever be, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?"

¹ Ps. ciii. 11, 12.

² Rev. i. 20.

³ Jude 13.

⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 40—42.

and the son of man, that Thou visitest him ⁵?" But I may go on to reflect, also, how Thou hast in Thy holy word made all those glorious bodies to be parables of divine instruction, and emblems of heavenly hope. The countless multitude of the stars suggests to me the encouraging thought of that vast "number which no man can number" of those who, in various ages and distant countries, have been redeemed out of the world, and have washed their garments and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; and who shall hereafter rejoice for ever before Thy throne. When I observe their stedfastness and wonderful order in their several courses, let me pray that I may myself be "stedfast and unmoveable" in that course of appointed duty to which Thou hast called me; and that Thy Church may ever be ordered by wise and faithful pastors, who shall see that all things be done in decency and order. And when I observe not only the glory and splendour of all the constellations, but also how "one star differeth from another star in glory," let me by faith look forward to the glory of the resurrection, when the vile body, that has been sown in dishonour, shall be raised in glory, and this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality. May I be counted worthy, through the merits of my Lord and Saviour, of even the least degree of that heavenly brightness; and when I see some faithful servant walking on his appointed course, as a burning and shining light, let me be moved to a holy zeal, that I may at least follow him on the way of faith and duty! At all times, and in all circumstances, let me endeavour so to live, that this vile body may hereafter be fashioned like unto my Saviour's glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby He is able to subdue all things to Himself ⁶.

⁵ Ps. viii. 3, 4.

⁶ Phil. iii. 21.

XIV.—THE TENT STRUCK.

"We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." 2 Cor. v. 1—4.—See also Gen. xviii. 1. Ps. xxxix. 12. Jer. xxxv. 7. John i. 14.

THE soul is sometimes said in Holy Scripture⁷ to dwell in a house of clay, the foundation of which is in the dust, and which is crushed before the moth. This comparison is most suitable to remind us of our frailness, and to check in us "the pride of life" and all high or vain imaginations. In other texts the soul is said to dwell in "a tent" or "tabernacle:" a habitation suited to one who is travelling through a desert and uninhabited land. We are therefore reminded by such expressions that we are "strangers and pilgrims upon earth⁸."

It was an act of faith in Abraham⁹ to dwell in tabernacles in the land of promise as in a strange country. His practice in this respect was a perpetual confession that he regarded himself only as a stranger and traveller on the earth, and that "he looked for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God." Again, the feast of tabernacles was appointed¹⁰ to remind the children of Israel of the wanderings of their forefathers in the wilderness (when they dwelt in tents), and thus to suggest to them continually the same thought, that this life is only a pilgrimage, and that our true home is elsewhere, that we have here no continuing city, but seek one to come¹.

By faith, a Christian continually regards his body

⁷ Job iv. 19.

⁸ Heb. xi. 13.

⁹ Heb. xi. 9.

¹⁰ Lev. xxiii. 34.

¹ Heb. xiii. 14.

as a tent or tabernacle, a frail and uncertain habitation, suited to the condition of one who is only a traveller to his true home, offering no effectual protection against the many dangers to which he is exposed, a dwelling-place which may be struck or taken down in a moment. Thus St. Paul calls the body "the earthly house of this tabernacle," which may soon be "dissolved;" and St. Peter says, "I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me²."

The similitude, however, which reminds us so touchingly of our state as pilgrims in this world, may also suggest to us, that if the body be thus liable to be soon "dissolved," it may also soon be put together again, even as a tent, which is soon struck, is as easily and quickly set up again.

Let me, then, be daily more and more sensible of the present frailty and vileness of that tenement which the soul is appointed for a season to inhabit, and on which so many lavish all their care, while they take no pains to adorn and beautify³ its immortal inhabitant, nor to provide for its wants, when, its tabernacle being put off, it will pass to another state of being, and will be found "naked and unclothed," if it be not "clothed upon with a house which is from heaven—a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Regarding my body only as a tent, let me live on earth⁴ as a stranger and sojourner with God, not entangling myself with those things which I am always leaving, but still looking forward with earnest desire to the true home, to which I am continually drawing nigh. Knowing how soon the tent may be struck, let me prepare myself for the journey which must then be taken; and whenever that time shall come, believe with

² 2 Pet. i. 13, 14.

³ Ps. cxlix. 4, and 1 Pet. iii. 3.

⁴ 1 Pet. ii. 11.

joyful confidence, that when the dark valley is past, the tent shall be set up again, no more to be taken down, inasmuch as mortality will then have been swallowed up of life.

XV.—THE WILD GOAT UPON THE MOUNTAINS.

“He maketh my feet like hinds’ feet, and setteth me upon my high places.” Ps. xviii. 33.

“The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies.” Ps. civ. 18.—See also Deut. xxxiii. 25. Ps. xciv. 18. Hab. iii. 19.

How safely does the wild goat rest on the side of the precipitous mountain, or climb the dizzy height, where our brain would turn and our feet would inevitably slip! How freely and fearlessly does she leap from rock to rock! Her eye is as true, and her foot as sure upon the steep and slippery crag, as on some beaten road! God has fitted her for “the high hills” on which He has appointed her to live, and has endued her with those faculties of the foot, and of the eye, which enable her, even in the darkest night, to walk on rocks and precipices where man could not tread securely under the noonday light.

The servant of the Lord is thus enabled to dwell securely wherever God has appointed the bounds of his habitation; and to go forward freely and fearlessly on the path of Christian duty. He may be exposed to temptations which he would once have thought it impossible to endure; or he may have to bear up against sorrows to which he would once have looked forward with dismay, as sure to swallow him up^s. He may have to serve God in high and difficult duties, to which he would have thought himself utterly unequal; or he may be called even to the giddy and slippery places of worldly greatness, where those who witness his course expect

^s 2 Cor. ii. 7.

that he will stumble fatally, at some unguarded moment. But as long as he is in the path of duty, and as long as he looks to God for strength, he is endued with grace exactly fitted, both in kind and degree, to the duty which God calls him to discharge, the sorrows which God calls him to meet, the temptations which God calls him to endure. His strength is as his day. His feet do not stumble even on the dark precipices amidst which he may have to climb the narrow path; and his confession is ever the thankful acknowledgment of the Psalmist, "He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places."

How different is it with those who are so far from keeping the path of duty, that they rush into manifold snares and dangers in which it is impossible to stand upright; or, if they abstain from such miserable self-will, yet seek not the only strength and power which could keep them from falling⁶! Such persons are ever going blindly forward on slippery places, or sleeping on the edge of precipices; and though by God's mercy they are withheld for a time from the destruction which they might fall into at any moment, yet at length they stumble to their utter ruin both of body and soul. It is of these that we read, "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when Thou awakest, Thou shalt despise their image⁷."

Lord! I know not what may be the difficulties or the temptations which I may be called to meet; but do Thou ever send out Thy light and truth⁸ that they may lead me. Endue me with those graces of Thy Spirit which may prepare and qualify me for my various trials. Do Thou uphold my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not⁹.

⁶ Jude 24.

⁸ Ps. xliii.

⁷ Ps. lxxiii. 18—20.

⁹ Ps. xviii. 36, and xvii.

XVI.—GOLD IN THE FURNACE.

“Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ sope: and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.” Mal. iii. 2, 3.—See also 1 Cor. iii. 13—15.

As the precious metals are seldom found in a pure and simple state, it is necessary to separate them from the dross with which they are mixed, by melting the ore in a furnace. By this means the dross is consumed, and whatever gold or silver is contained in the ore, is purged or purified from the baser substance with which it was before blended, and preserved for any purposes to which those precious metals are applied. The refiner casts the ore into the furnace, not to destroy the gold or the silver that is contained in it, but to prove its quality and fineness, and to extract it from the ore in a state of perfect purity. And he watches the furnace all the time that the process is going on, that its heat may not exceed the due degree, nor the metals be left in it too long. Whatever comes forth from the trial is precious gold, fit for the royal crown, or to be wrought into the noblest vessels.

Our blessed Lord “gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works¹.” And He is, therefore, said to sit “as a refiner and purifier of silver,” because it is ever His gracious and merciful purpose to sanctify us wholly in body, soul, and spirit, from all that defileth. He would have us holy, not only in outward appearance, but in the hidden man of the heart, even as we read of the king’s daughter, that not only her garments are of wrought gold, but she is “all glorious within².” And because the precious gold is mixed with so much of earthly

¹ Titus ii. 14.

² Ps. xlv. 13.

dross, and it is absolutely necessary that what is precious should be separated from what is vile, the trials by which He purges us from our old corruptions and iniquities, are likened to the furnace into which the refiner casts the ore, that the dross may be consumed. They who are altogether "dross," will be proved to be worthless and vile by this trial of holy discipline; but those who are "transformed by the renewing of their mind"³ from their old and evil conversation, are only purged and purified by their afflictions; and when they come forth from their trial, they are regarded as "the jewels" of the Great King, and are as "vessels unto honour" in His house⁴. It is even said of them, that they shall be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of their God⁵. Thus St. Peter, speaking of the joy of Christians, adds, "though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ⁶."

Our duty then, in seasons of affliction, is still to remember the merciful purpose for which it is sent; and that our gracious Lord does not cast us into the furnace in order to consume and bring us to nothing, but in order to consume and burn up in us what is evil, and to bring us forth (after we have been proved to be true and genuine gold) as vessels unto honour. We should remember that He is ever watching the furnace, that the heat may not be too fierce for our feeble strength; and that as He Himself was present with those faithful servants of God who were literally cast into "the burning fiery furnace⁷," so He will not fail to strengthen us, if we look to Him for

³ Rom. xii. 2.⁴ Mal. iii. 17.⁵ 2 Tim. ii. 20.⁶ Isa. lxii. 3. See Similitude i. Second Series.⁷ 1 Pet. i. 6, 7.⁸ Dan. iii. 23.

grace, under whatever trial may be laid upon us. It should be, therefore, our earnest purpose to "glorify the Lord in the fires," by patience, and calm trust; and we should even desire that whatever is necessary for our true purification, may not be withheld. We cannot expect that the work of sanctification can be wrought in us by an easier discipline than is required in the case of so many of our fellow Christians. In the season of sorrow, then, let us not think it strange¹ concerning the fiery trial that is to try us, as though some strange thing happened to us, but rejoice, inasmuch as we are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that, when His glory shall be revealed, we may be glad also with exceeding joy. When we see any fail under their trial, and proved to be only counterfeit gold or worthless dross, may we be moved to more earnest prayer and more faithful endeavours, so to improve the gift of God that is in us that we may come forth from the furnace as pure and genuine gold, not one grain of which shall be lost in the fire!

XVII.—WINE ON THE LEES.

"Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed." Jer. xlviii. 11.—See also Zeph. i. 12.

If wine is left to refine and feed upon its lees, it becomes much stronger than if it be often emptied from vessel to vessel. Its taste remains in it, and its scent is not changed. In many cases it is necessary to pour the wine from vessel to vessel, in order to produce the proper flavour and the degree of strength which makes it most fit for use.

When the prophet Jeremiah was describing the vices and sensuality of Moab, he compared that people to wine which had been suffered to lie and settle on its lees. They had enjoyed a long-continued

¹ Isa. xxiv. 15.

¹ 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13.

prosperity, and had not known the trial of captivity in an enemy's land. And the effect of their worldly prosperity had been, that they became more proud, more sensual, and more presumptuous. They were more thoroughly imbued with the vices of their old nature, and trusted with carnal confidence and security to the riches and sensual pleasures which they had enjoyed with so little interruption.

Thus we are warned of the danger of worldly prosperity, and of the benefit of the Divine chastisements. Far better is it to be "emptied," so to say, "from vessel to vessel;" to be disturbed in a life of ease and sensual indulgence; than to be left to settle ourselves upon our lees; or, in other words, to live like the rich fool² who said to his soul, "Take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry;" without concern about the change which awaits us all, and the solemn account which we have all to give.

Awaken me, O Lord, from a state of carnal ease and security! Let me still remember that pride and idleness too often go together with fulness of bread³: and that it will be enough to exclude us from the bright inheritance, to have lived a life of sensual indulgence in forgetfulness of God and of the poor. May no chastisement be unwelcome, which may serve to rouse me from so fatal a state! Let me count as a blessing any discipline that may change me from my old condition, and may tend to quicken me to a life of faith and earnestness.

XVIII.—THE EARLY DEW.

"O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away." Hosea vi. 4.—See also 2 Kings xii. 2. Luke viii. 13.

How bright is the face of nature, when every blade is glistening with the early dew; and the light clouds

² Luke xii. 19.

³ Ezek. xvi. 49.

are painted with all those gorgeous colours by which she seems to prepare herself for the return of her absent king the sun ! But how soon do those hues and those jewels of the early morning pass away ! Long before the sun has attained his meridian height, the sky has become cloudless ; and the parched land seems in vain to thirst for the refreshing dew, and the kindly shower.

Thus beautiful is early piety ! Thus engaging and full of promise are the fresh feelings of youth ; before the withering chill of the world has passed upon them. How easily is the heart then touched with tenderness or pity ; how the eye glistens at the tale of sorrow ; how the cheek shows that the sense of shame may be awakened by the gentlest admonition ! But before some few short years are passed, the character, in too many instances, is fatally changed. A reckless and irreverent hardihood has taken the place of that ingenuous modesty which we used to love ; and the sophistry or ridicule of the world has led to the suppression of the more pure and gentle feelings. A false shame has too often ensnared the soul in vices which it abhors ; or has made it shrink habitually from avowing, or acting on, the principles which it secretly knows to be true.

When men praise you, my child, for any token of religious principle in youth, think of the early dew, and the morning cloud ; and pray earnestly to God that any goodness which they discern in you may be real and abiding ; and that it may be deepened and confirmed every day you live. Remember that mere profession is like the dew that is soon dried up ; but true principle is like a well of water, springing up perpetually. The wicked are said to be “clouds without water⁴.” Be it your endeavour that a blessed and kindly influence may ever distil from you on all around you ; and that you may practise that pure and

⁴ Jude 12.

undefiled religion, of which the Apostle has told us⁵ that it is this; "To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

XIX.—THE RACE.

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Heb. xii. 1, 2.—See also 1 Cor. ix. 24—27. Phil. iii. 13, 14. 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

It was the practice in ancient Greece to celebrate, with great solemnity, certain games, which were chiefly trials of bodily strength or skill, and were attended by a vast assemblage of people of all ranks. The prize that was contended for was a crown or chaplet of leaves, with which the victor was crowned; while his name was proclaimed by heralds in the presence of the whole assembly; and there were judges appointed to decide on the merits of the candidates; and to see that the several contests were conducted according to the laws that were laid down.

The foot-race was one of the principal of these games; and St. Paul has in many places alluded to it, in illustration of the Christian life. He means us to understand, that a Christian's life should be a continual strife or contest for victory over our manifold corrupt and deceitful lusts; and he encourages us to maintain the conflict by the thought that we are contending for a glorious prize, in the presence of a great crowd of witnesses. The crown for which we contend (he reminds us) is not a chaplet of fading leaves, but a crown of righteousness, and glory. "Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible."

⁵ James i. 27.

The witnesses of our manful efforts are the great company of those cited by the Apostle, who have before us gained this mastery over sin, the world, and the devil, and have now by faith and patience attained the promises. We should also always remind ourselves, that we contend for the prize of our high calling in the presence of God, and of His holy angels.

We are to remember, then, that a man who was about to contend in a foot-race, would first lay aside every weight that might be about his person, and would disencumber himself of every needless garment. Thus we are to prepare ourselves for our course by laying aside every weight: and this is explained by what is added, "the sin that doth so easily beset us." The prophet Habakkuk says, "Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! . . . and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay⁶!" He who does not take pains to divest himself of covetousness, and sensuality, and pride, and other too easily besetting sins, is as one who should lade himself with thick clay when about to start upon a race.

We are to remember, too, that when once they have started on their course, the candidates do not suffer themselves to relax in their efforts, until they have reached the end. They do not linger on the way, nor stop to look back with satisfaction on the progress which they have made; but they think only of what yet remains to be done, and they keep the eye steadily fixed upon the mark or goal. If they find themselves disposed to give way, they remember the prize which is such an object of desire, and press forward with renewed spirit.

Thus it will not do for us to relax our efforts to obtain the mastery over our own lusts and passions. They will gain upon us if we give them the least advantage. Nor must we reflect with self-righteous satisfaction on the progress which we have made in virtue; but rather remind ourselves how far we yet fall short not only of the perfect example of our

⁶ Hab. ii. 6.

blessed Saviour, but even of the attainments of His faithful servants. Thus St. Paul says, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." We must run the race with faith and patience. If we find ourselves faint and weary, we must think of the shame of giving over or coming short; we must look up to the crown of glory which "the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give" to those who finish their course with joy and faithfulness; we must remember how He Himself, "for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

We see how miserably they err, who live in ease and security, and think that they shall get to heaven without any pains to purify their hearts, or to "endure hardness." It should be our continual endeavour to acquire the habits of watchfulness, temperance, diligence in duty, and self-mastery; and we should often say to ourselves, If men were willing to make such efforts for the sake of a fading wreath, how greatly shall we be condemned, if we shrink from exertion and self-denial, when a crown of glory is the prize set before us!

XX.—THE FAITHFUL STEWARD.

"And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath." Luke xii. 42—44.—See also Ps. cxxiii. 2. Matt. xxv. 14—30. Luke xix. 12—27. John xiii. 13. Eph. vi. 6. 9.

"A SON honoureth his father (says God by his prophet Malachi'), and a servant his master: if then I be

a father, where is Mine honour? and if I be a master, where is My fear?" In this place, as in many others, God compares Himself to a master, in order to remind us that we are placed on earth not to do our own will, but the will of Him who placed us here; and that we have nothing which is properly our own; but that whatever we seem to have is entrusted to us by Another, who has left us in charge for a season, and will call us to account when He shall return. In the parables of "the pounds" and "the talents," the same idea is very plainly brought before us. The ministers of the Gospel are indeed, in an especial manner, compared to stewards whom a heavenly Master has set over His household to provide for it, and to govern and instruct it in His absence⁸. But every Christian has received a stewardship from God, of which he will have to give account⁹ at the great day of reckoning. And we are taught, that the sentence by which the Judge will declare his approval of the righteous, will be addressed to them as good and faithful servants.

There is nothing against which our hearts naturally rise more stubbornly than the idea of being subject to another's will, and of having nothing that is our own. The wicked are represented by the Psalmist as saying, "With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?"¹ Whereas it is said of true Christians², that they bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. They know that they are not their own, but are bought with a price; and it is therefore their great purpose to glorify God in their body, and in their spirit, which are His³.

Now, as we cannot serve God without renouncing the service of sin, and our feeble will is too apt to shrink from the effort which is required to break its bondage to that old taskmaster, it very commonly happens, that we think to unite the services of God and mammon, of Christ and sin. We know too much

⁸ 1 Cor. iv. 1, 2.⁹ Luke xvi. 2.¹ Ps. xii. 4.² 2 Cor. x. 5.³ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

of our happiness and duty to renounce deliberately the service of God; but we cannot resolve to break asunder the bonds of sin, and cast off their power over us. And therefore we do some things to please God, and satisfy conscience, while yet we shrink from determining to follow him fully⁴, and in all things give ourselves up to His blessed will. Our gracious Lord has warned us of the folly of thus endeavouring to join together what can have no concord or agreement. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon⁵." And we should reflect on that appeal of the holy prophet to the weak and wavering Israelites, "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him⁶."

Let me know that true independence is found in depending always upon God; true freedom in His service; true fearlessness in fearing Him; true riches in remembering always the account which I must give hereafter for every thing that I seem to have. The various faculties of my soul, and body; the opportunities afforded by having my days lengthened; the gifts of station, education, friends, and worldly substance; the knowledge of religious truth, and all the means of grace; the various occasions for doing or receiving good; these, and numberless advantages and blessings which are daily and hourly extended to me, must all be accounted for to Him who knows most thoroughly what I can do, and what is beyond my strength; and who has taught me that he who, in ignorance of his lord's will, commits things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes; but that he who knew his lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. How much have I received of the Lord, and

⁴ Num. xiv. 24.⁵ Matt. vi. 24.⁶ 1 Kings xviii. 21.

how much will therefore be required of me ! What reason have I to repent of past waste and unfaithfulness, and to live with continual recollection of the day when it shall be said unto me, Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward !

XXI.—THE GREAT PHYSICIAN.

“As Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Matt. ix. 10—13.—See also Ps. xxxviii. 2—10. Ps. i. 5. Matt. viii. 17. Luke iv. 23.

THE sickness of the body is a continual type of sin in Holy Scripture; and our blessed Saviour, who came “to make an end of sins⁷,” is compared (or rather He compares Himself) to a great and compassionate Physician, who came to heal all the sicknesses and all the diseases of the soul. Thus also He compares Himself to the brazen serpent in the wilderness, which was lifted up upon a pole, that all those who were bitten by the fiery serpents might be healed by looking at it⁸.

When it is said that He came to “heal the sick,” it is implied, that they who benefit by the remedy which is offered to them, are such as know “the plague of their own heart⁹,” and are truly desirous that it may be entirely and thoroughly healed. Too many are ignorant of their own spiritual malady, and fancy themselves “whole,” when they are indeed “sore diseased,” and have no “whole part” in their soul. Others are conscious that they are indeed tainted as with a leprosy; but yet they are so averse

⁷ Dan. ix. 24.

⁸ John iii. 14, 15.

⁹ 1 Kings viii. 38.

to true holiness of life, and to the sharp remedies also which may be required in their case, that they do not truly desire to be healed. They wish to meet with physicians who will heal their hurt "slightly"¹, or will say to them "smooth things," not the very truth of their sad case, but what they wish to hear. We shall not benefit by the Great Physician, if we either confess not our malady, or go to Him with only half a desire to have the wound probed and the disease removed. But if we go to Him as the leper went, who said, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean"²; He will speak to us the gracious words, "I will; be thou clean." If we look to Him as the dying Israelites looked to the brazen serpent, (with the most earnest desire that the poison might be removed,) or if we go to Him as the woman with an issue of blood, who came behind in the crowd, and touched the hem of His garment³; we shall find that such "virtue" will pass out of Him, as will by degrees heal the soul even of the most malignant and inveterate disorder. We need not ask the mournful question, "Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there?"⁴ for we have a compassionate Healer ever near; and the miracles which He wrought on the bodies of the sick, were typical of the greater miracles which He is ever ready and willing to work in restoring our unhappy souls to spiritual health and soundness. The remedy is sufficient, if we are willing to use it; and if we have faith to give ourselves up to His guidance, and to walk by His appointed rules; though, perhaps, we may not see the reason for them, nor for some time experience their benefit.

¹ Jer. vi. 14.² Matt. viii. 2.³ Luke viii. 43, 44.⁴ Jer. viii. 22.

XXII.—THE CAPTIVE.

"Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money." Isa. lii. 3.—See also Exod. ii. 23. Acts viii. 23. Rom. vi. 16.

It is said of the wicked, that they are taken captive by the devil at his will⁵. It is said of them also, that they "have sold themselves for nought." Satan could not take them captive, unless they consented to his wicked suggestions, and closed with the temptation by which he promises them some miserable gain, or pleasure, in exchange for themselves. What he offers is indeed tempting at the moment; but it is "nought;" it is good for nothing; and the deceived and unhappy sinner, to whom liberty was promised, finds himself only the servant of corruption: "for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage⁶." How miserable is his state, when he sees indeed "the glorious liberty" which is enjoyed by "the children of God," who "walk in the light of the Lord;" and finds himself under a hard yoke to sin and Satan, which he knows not how to break! The Apostle represents the misery of this state, when (speaking in the person of one who is still groaning under it) he says, "I am carnal, sold under sin." And again, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Christ came to set us free from this disgraceful and unhappy bondage. His name of "Redeemer" implies that He came to pay a price to deliver such as were in captivity. In the first sermon which He preached at Nazareth⁷ He applied to Himself the words of the prophet, "The Spirit of the Lord God

⁵ 2 Tim. ii. 26.

⁷ Rom. vii. 14—24.

⁶ 2 Pet. ii. 19.

⁸ Luke iv. and Isa. lxi. 1.

is upon Me: because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek: He hath sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted; to proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." Whether the chains by which we are bound, are the chains of custom and habit; or the chains of the fear of man, and the dread of losing the friendship of the world; or the chains of sloth, or of some special forbidden indulgence; He will enable us to break asunder the bonds, if we are thoroughly desirous to be made free. He has paid the price of our deliverance, and puts the means of freedom into our hands. What deep disgrace is it, if, with the means of liberty in our hands, we hug our old chains, and sink back into our old corruptions! How many a heathen who earnestly longed to be set free from the bondage of corruption⁹, will rise up against us in the judgment and condemn us¹; if with the full opportunity afforded us of walking at liberty in the ways of holy duty, we choose rather to remain the willing bondmen of Satan!

XXIII.—THE ROARING LION.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith." 1 Pet. v. 8, 9.—See also Job i. 7. Ps. vii. 2; xxii. 13. Rev. xii. 12.

WE are told², "The lions roaring after their prey do seek their meat from God." The lion is subtle as well as fierce and powerful; and no less active than subtle. He takes a wide range in quest of prey, or lurks for it in his secret den³; and springs upon it with a strength which it is vain to resist, and a fierceness which knows not what it is to spare.

⁹ Rom. viii. 21.

² Ps. civ.

¹ Matt. xii. 41.

³ Ps. x. 9.

By comparing the devil to a roaring lion that walketh about, seeking whom he may devour, God has instructed me in the subtlety and cruelty of that great enemy; and the necessity of being always on my guard against him. He knows my weak points: he knows how to spring on me with advantage, when I am least prepared for his assault. He would make my soul his prey, and reign over it as a cruel lord, or miserably devour it. If baffled, or defeated, he is ready at once to renew the contest, and finds often that he can do so most successfully, when the soul that has lately conquered him, is tempted to think itself in less danger for a time, and perhaps to presume on its own strength. What advantage do we give him, if we suffer our minds to be taken up with the things of this world, or to be surcharged and deadened by undue indulgence in yielding to the desires of the body! What need have we to be ever on our guard; that so being steadfast in the faith, we may be enabled to resist him!

Blessed be God, we are taught that our great Redeemer hath "prevailed." According to the word that went before of Him⁴, He hath trodden upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the dragon He hath trampled under His feet. And He hath given us a sure rule, by which we shall escape this disgraced and conquered enemy: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you; draw nigh to God, and God will draw nigh to you⁵."

XXIV.—HUSBANDRY.

"For thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns." Jer. iv. 3.—See also Matt. xiii. 3—30. Mark iv. 26—29.

THERE is scarcely a process of husbandry which does not supply some image and illustration of Divine things to the sacred writers.

⁴ Ps. xci. 13.

⁵ James iv. 7, 8.

The careless and carnal heart is likened to the hard fallow ground, full of thorns and weeds, which must be broken up and ploughed, that it may be fit to receive the good seed; and the Law of God, which alarms the sinner in his fancied security, and carries conviction to his soul, is the sharp ploughshare, by which the ground is thus opened and prepared.

The Word of God is "the seed" which is sown by the great Husbandman; and the parable of "the sower" sets forth to us the various reception which it meets with from the several sorts of ground on which it falls. The silent and gradual growth of religion in the heart, under the influence of the dew of God's grace, and the beams of the Sun of Righteousness, is described in the parable of "the seed growing secretly," while that of "the wheat and tares" is intended to prepare us for the present admixture of the evil with the good in the visible Church of Christ, as well as to assure us of the final separation of the two classes. The harvest (we are told) is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels. The saint who has finished his course with joy, is said⁶ to come to his grave like as a shock of corn cometh in his season; but the wicked are like the worthless weeds, which are bound in bundles to be burnt, while the wheat is gathered into the barn. The Husbandman, "whose fan is in his hand," to separate the grain from the chaff when the corn has been threshed on the floor, is an emblem of the Son of Man when He shall return to judgment. The Church will then have undergone that searching trial which is necessary to discern the precious from the vile (and which is compared to the process of threshing⁷); and the last judgment will separate for ever the one from the other, as the chaff is scattered from the grain by the fan or winnowing-machine. The wicked "are like the chaff which the wind scattereth away from the face of the earth⁸."

⁶ Job v. 26.

⁸ Isa. xxi. 10.

⁷ Matt. iii. 12.

⁹ Ps. i. 4.

And "he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

A book is thus laid open to us at all seasons of the year, in which (if it be not our own fault) we may read lessons of Divine instruction; and he whose mind is stored with scriptural thoughts and images, cannot walk forth abroad without having "the things which concern his peace" suggested to him by the humblest employments of the husbandman whom he sees engaged in his useful labours. When he sees "the plower" making "long furrows" in the "fallow ground," he will pray that his heart may be "a broken and a contrite heart," and that the thorns and weeds which would choke the good seed may be utterly rooted out. The sower going forth to sow will recal the image of the gracious Saviour, who left His glory with the Father, to bear "precious seed" to the souls of men; and the sight of some springing field which is glistening with dew, and quietly growing up to its perfect and matured condition, will lead to humble and earnest prayer, that the plant of true religion may thus thrive in his own heart, and the dews of God's grace may thus fall upon it. When the fields are "white unto the harvest¹," his soul will be kindled with a holy desire, both that he may himself be thus by degrees ripened for the heavenly Husbandman, and also that it may please "the Lord of the harvest" to "send forth labourers" into that harvest of immortal souls which is perishing for want of being gathered. The field busy with the reapers will suggest the solemn thoughts of death, and judgment; and when the corn is threshed and winnowed, he will reflect, "with fear and trembling," on that searching trial which every soul of man must undergo, and the miserable portion of those who shall not be able "to stand in the judgment," nor to appear in the congregation of the righteous. He will remember, how-

¹ John iv. 35.

ever, that not one grain of wheat will fall through the sieve in which it will be sifted².

Led on to a somewhat different train of thoughts, he will then remind himself, that what a man sows he will also reap; and how it is written, that they who have sown the wind shall reap the whirlwind, and they who "sow to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption³:" and, on the other hand, that "he that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him⁴."

Holy resolutions and faithful endeavours are the fruit of such peaceful meditation as is thus suggested to the soul; and we may surely say, "Whoso is wise will ponder these things, and they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord⁵."

XXV.—A CRY FROM THE GREAT DEPTHS.

"Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications."
Ps cxxx. 1, 2.—See also Jonah i. ii.

THE language which Jonah used when he was literally in the depths of the sea, and when he prayed to God out of the whale's belly, is applicable to the case of a sinner, when he sees the full measure of his guilt and danger, and cries to God out of the depths of those abounding sins which seem to pour in like a flood upon his soul⁶, to bear him down for ever. This is so much the case, that Jonah seems to have applied to his own condition (when he was inclosed in that strange and fearful prison) the expressions which David had long before used with reference to his temporal or spiritual sorrows, and which have been used in all ages of the Church as descriptive of the feelings of

² Amos ix. 9.

⁵ Ps. cvii. 43.

³ Gal. vi. 8.

⁴ Ps. cxvi. 6.

⁶ Isa. lix. 19.

every soul which feels the power of its corruptions, and the dreadful consequences of the wrath of God. We find his words, "I said, I am cast out of the sight of thine eyes," in Psalm xxxi. 22; and those, "All thy billows and thy waves passed over me," occur in Psalm xlii. 7; and again, when he says, "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul," he seems to use the first verses of Psalm lxix.: "Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me."

The same application may be made of the case of St. Peter⁷, when he walked on the water to meet Jesus; "but when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried, Lord, save me! And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

What can more strongly show the danger of a sinner, than that he should be likened to a drowning man? How little are most people sensible of the abounding power of evil, and how it drowns in destruction and perdition⁸ all those who plunge into it! And we should also picture to ourselves the eagerness with which a drowning man catches at the rope which is thrown within his reach. He knows his own helplessness; and he is conscious that his preservation depends upon the rope, and on those who hold it. He clings to it instinctively. He has no thought of taking merit to himself for an escape, in effecting which he must indeed co-operate with his compassionate friends, but for which he owns himself to be indebted only to their exertions.

It is thus that when a man sees himself in danger of perishing for ever, he eagerly and thankfully lays hold of the hope set before him⁹; and while he knows, indeed, that he must earnestly work with God¹, he ascribes

⁷ Matt. xiv. 30, 31.

⁹ Heb. vi. 18.

⁸ 1 Tim. vi. 9.

¹ Phil. ii. 12, 13.

the whole glory of his salvation, from beginning to end, to the free and sovereign grace of his Lord and Saviour.

Blessed be God, that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound²; and that in the instances of David, and Jonah, and St. Peter, and all who have heartily used their language, we see the willingness and power of God to help us, even when we are sinking in the great depths. The same Psalm which begins with the earnest supplication, "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord! Lord, hear my voice," is concluded with the cheering exhortation and promise, "O Israel trust in the Lord! for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption; and He shall redeem Israel from all his sins."

XXVI.—THE HELM OF A GREAT SHIP.

"In many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" James iii. 2—5.—See also Ps. xxxii. 9; xxxix. 1. James i. 26.

THE Apostle here teaches us, that if we would "bridle the whole body," we must begin by bridling the tongue. This is not, perhaps, the rule which we should have expected. Men, for the most part, take little account of their words. Many who are sensible that they are to some extent responsible for their actions, seem to think that words are of so airy and fleeting a nature, that it shows an over-scrupulous mind for a man to be always setting a watch before his mouth, and keeping the door of his

² Rom. v. 20.

lips. As they seldom themselves reflect on what they are about to say, on what they have said; so they think that the eternal Judge will never bring them to a reckoning for what they call slight offences of the tongue, committed without meaning or purpose.

Now God has taught us that for every idle word we shall give account in the day of judgment. But this is not all. St. James teaches us that a man who does not set a bridle upon his tongue, has no real mastery over his various passions; and that the true government of the tongue is the great test of religious sincerity in other things.

And as he knew that this doctrine would startle that vast number of persons who take little or no account of what they say, he shows by two similitudes, that what seems small and insignificant, has often the greatest power for good or evil. "The strength of a horse" is far greater than the strength of a man; yet, when a bit is put into his mouth, he is tamed by what seems so powerless and insignificant; and his whole body is turned at the will of the rider.

In like manner, the helm is a very small part of a ship; yet, whatever be the bulk of the vessel, it obeys the helm or rudder, and is "turned about whithersoever the governor listeth." The helm seems to have power even over the fierce winds by which the ship is driven; for it enables "the governor" to direct the course of the vessel, notwithstanding the violence of the winds.

By these similitudes, St. James prepares us to admit, that although the tongue is indeed a very small member, yet a man's whole character is affected by the licence which he gives it on the one hand, or the care which he takes to bridle it on the other. And this declaration of an inspired Apostle should lead us very seriously to reflect on our own practice, and way of thinking, in this respect. We cannot but see that our words have great power over the passions of most people whom we meet with. "A soft answer turneth

away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger³." "A word spoken in season, how good is it⁴!" But what we are perhaps less prepared to acknowledge is, that if we bridle our tongue, it is a sign that we are able to bridle our whole body; but if we do not bridle our tongue, it is a sign that we are unruly and ungoverned in other respects. Thus an unbridled tongue is a sign of an ill-regulated mind. May we lay this plain declaration of an inspired writer to heart, and heartily purpose with the Psalmist, that our "mouths shall not offend:" and may we strive to act up to his holy resolution; "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me!" Not only let us take care that "no corrupt communication" may proceed out of our mouth; but that whatsoever we say, may be "good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers⁵."

XXVII.—ONE BODY AND MANY MEMBERS.

"For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." Rom. xii. 4, 5.—See also 1 Cor. xii. 12—27.

THE union of all Christians with Christ and with each other, in one Holy Church, is a great article of Christian faith. It means much more than that we are united together by professing the same truths; and more also than that we have all a sameness of nature, such as we all derive from Adam. This is indeed true, but more than this is meant by the union betwixt Christ and His people. It means that Christ, who is in heaven, is also dwelling by His Spirit in all His members, so as to make them one with Him and with

³ Prov. xv. 1.

⁴ Prov. xv. 23.

⁵ Eph. iv. 29.

each other, by an union which is closer than that of parent and child; and this Divine presence in our hearts is ordinarily and chiefly vouchsafed by means of the holy sacraments; which are the channels of grace to all those in whom their effect is not hindered by impenitence, and unbelief.

It has pleased God to set forth to us this high and mysterious fact, by comparing it to the union between our own body and its various members; and the similitude reminds us of many most instructive truths.

1. If we are "the body of Christ," then we have the comfort of knowing that Christ is our life⁶. He is to our souls what the living principle is to our bodies. Being our "Head," He is our counsellor and guide in all difficulties and anxieties. Being our "Life," He is our strength in all assaults of Satan, in all trials and temptations. So that it is not our own strength, nor our own wisdom, that we depend upon; but the strength and wisdom of Christ. And thus the Apostle⁸ says, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me." We have therefore the comfort of trusting that we are adopted in Christ, and justified and accepted; and may fully believe that no trials or temptations shall be too great for us, if we are strong in the Lord who dwelleth in us, and in the power of His might⁷. And surely if we remember that we are "the members of Christ," we shall regard both our souls and bodies with a more solemn and reverential feeling; and shall fear above all things to defile by any wilful sin what is His and not our own¹⁰.

2. We are reminded by this similitude, that we are bound to devote ourselves to Christ's service in continual usefulness and duty. That is scarcely to be called a member of our body which is of no use to

⁶ Col. iii. 4.

⁷ Eph. iv. 15.

⁸ Gal. ii. 20.

⁹ Eph. vi. 10.

¹⁰ 1 Cor. vi. 15—20.

the body; nor can he be called a true member of Christ who is of no use to the Church (which is Christ's body), according to the calling in life which God has appointed for him. The Apostle says, "there are many members in one body, and all have not the same office." All have some office, but all have not the same office. And thus in Christ's body, every member is appointed to some useful office; some work of faith, and labour of love, in the daily duties of our various callings. No two members are appointed to the same office, but all have some service or other assigned to them. The services of some are more honourable than the occupations of others; but there is no member of Christ that is not called to serve God, in some course of useful and dutiful obedience. As we should cut off from the body a member that became useless and cumbrous, so will Christ cut off such members as are mere incumbrances on His Church; and however diligent we may be in the business of this world, we are cumberers of the ground in His sight, if we are not setting His glory before us as the end of all our undertakings.

3. This similitude reminds us of our mutual dependence one upon another. "The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you." If any member could sever itself from the rest, in a proud independence, it would utterly perish. The members "have the same care one of another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it¹." Thus in the Church, there is no member so high but that he may have need of the service of the lowest; and none so low but that he may minister most needfully to the highest. This thought will effectually put down all feelings of pride in those who have higher gifts than others, and all risings of discontent in such as are called to more mean and lowly services. It is

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 25, 26.

God who has appointed each member to his own use and office; and as it is an amazing impiety in those who have received greater talents, to despise such as have less; so also is it in these, if they be not content with such offices as God has assigned to them. It has been well said, that the little brook which waters a few fields, fulfils the office assigned to it by Providence, as truly as the mighty river, which bears on its bosom the commerce of a nation.

And we see also what ground there is for mutual sympathy, help, and love, among all the many members. How closely should we keep to those holy ordinances by which our fellowship is effected, and realized! and how earnestly should we endeavour to give proof of that blessed fellowship, by the truest sympathy with all our fellow-members, and by the most ready exertions of Christian love towards all; whether they be high or low; whether they be in our own land, or in foreign countries! The tie of Christian fellowship unites us to all who have been baptized into the same body; nor is it severed by death itself. It binds together those who have entered into their rest with those who are yet militant on earth. It is the true source of comfort in the hour of bereavement, and sorrow.

XXVIII.—THE RAINBOW.

“I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.” Gen. ix. 13—16.—See also Ezek. i. 28. Rev. iv. 3.

THE rainbow is not so much a similitude, as a sign and token in the cloud of God's covenant with man. It is caused by the refraction of the sunbeams in the drops

of the falling shower; and is therefore a sign of rain; though by God's appointment it is changed into an assurance and pledge that the rain shall never again prevail, as it prevailed in the deluge. It is thus become an emblem of a covenant of grace and mercy to a guilty world. And the very beauty of that faultless arch which joins the heaven with the earth, and of those colours which are so brilliant, and so softly blended into each other, seems to render it the more suitable token of that blessed Gospel, which proclaims "glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

And thus we find, that in such visions as were of old vouchsafed to saints and prophets, the more dreadful brightness of the Divine glory was ever tempered by the appearance of a rainbow, blending itself with "the colour of amber out of the midst of the fire, or the colour of the terrible crystal." The Prophet Ezekiel "saw as it were the appearance of fire; and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about." And St. John says, "He that sat on the throne, was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone. And there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald." And again*, "I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud; and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire."

The rainbow thus proclaims to us an opening of mercy in the midst of judgment and anger. And, since that which is itself the sign of rain, has become a pledge that the rain shall no more prevail; it seems especially to remind us that the grace of God makes all things new; and so changes the character even of what in itself is a remembrance of wrath, as to make it a pledge of mercy. Thus the sentence that man shall eat bread in the sweat of his brow³ has become

* Rev. x. 1.

³ Gen. iii. 19.

a source of happiness, by enforcing useful employment, and by leading to all the instruction of literature, and all the discoveries of art and science. Thus the trials of life are received as the chastisement of a loving Father, and not as the infliction of an angry Judge. The tears of penitence issue in the grace of Christ; and death itself is become the gate of life.

“The bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain” reminds us also, that in the very deepest affliction there is a way of deliverance. The colours of the rainbow are brightest when it is seen against the darkest cloud; and faith is able to see “all is well” written in characters of mercy upon the very darkest visitations of God’s providence. Faith still whispers to us, that when “night is darkest, dawn is nearest,” and that “man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.”

XXIX.—THE FISHERS AND THEIR NET.

“And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.” Matt. iv. 18—20.—See also Matt. xiii. 47—50.

WHEN we see fishermen mending their nets, or launching into the great deep, or drawing their net to the shore, we should reflect not only on the lowly condition and humble occupation of the blessed Apostles, before our Lord called them to follow Him, but also on the analogy and resemblance which exists (as His own expressions intimated) between their lowly employment and those high and honoured services to which they were thenceforth to devote themselves. “Follow me,” He said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” And in one of His parables, He has compared the Gospel preached in the world to a net cast into the sea, and gathering of every kind.

As the sea is a frequent type or emblem of the

world⁴, so "the fishes of the sea," which take their course at will, and so often prey upon one another throughout that waste of waters, represent the vast numbers who know not God, and walk in the way of their own hearts, without any sure guide or rule of conduct, and, too often, only envying and provoking, hating and devouring, one another. Into this broad sea of the whole world a net was to be cast; and instead of their lowly labours on the little sea of Galilee, the Apostles were to be employed in gathering men out of every clime and country into the Church of God, and in drawing them under the blessed restraints and holy discipline of "the obedience of faith." A net will indeed gather of every kind; and when it is drawn to the shore, a separation is made of the fishes which are worth the pains of taking out of the sea, and such as are nothing worth, and may be cast away. And thus we are reminded, that among those who are gathered into the visible Church of Christ there "are good and bad," many false professors as well as sincere servants of God; nor will the good be separated from the bad until the net is drawn completely to the shore; which will not be till the end of the world. In this world there will ever be an admixture of the evil with the good, even in the Church of Christ; but the time will come when the final separation shall be made; and those only who have willingly been drawn by the bands of love⁵, and have lived under the blessed restraints of pure and undefiled religion, will be gathered into the heavenly kingdom.

This similitude, then, should lead us to reflect how far this is as yet the case with ourselves. It reminds all those who are called to the ministry of the word and sacraments, how high and noble is the work to which they have devoted themselves, and with what a single mind, and unswerving purpose, they should

⁴ Dan. vii. 3.

⁵ Hos. xi. 4.

labour in drawing souls to Christ, catching them, as it were, with blameless guile ⁶, and even compelling them with holy earnestness, and gentle violence, to come in ⁷. And it should suggest to all persons the duty of examining whether they have suffered themselves to be drawn to God, and the restraints of real religion, out of the troubled sea of this world; and whether they are so living, that when the good shall at length be separated from the bad, they may hope to be gathered to a happy eternity.

XXX.—THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH.

“These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground (*stay*, marg.) of the truth.” 1 Tim. iii. 14, 15.—See also Matt. xvi. 18. Gal. ii. 9.

WHEN the Apostle calls the Church “the house of God” and “the pillar and stay of the truth,” it is supposed that the language he uses contains an allusion to the temple of Diana at Ephesus, which was the pillar and support of falsehood, idolatry, and vice. The Church was thus to be the visible support and witness for true religion in the world, and, as it were, the great rallying point of its disciples; or, it has been supposed, that he may have intended to allude to the two pillars which Solomon placed in the porch of the temple, and to which, it is said, the prophets affixed ⁸ their prophecies in writing, that they might be read by those who came to the temple to worship; or there may be an allusion to such stones or pillars as Joshua was commanded to raise ⁹ as a perpetual memorial of the passage of the people over Jordan; or the stone which Samuel set up ¹, and called Eben-

⁶ 2 Cor. xii. 16.

⁸ See Macknight on this text.

⁷ Luke xiv. 23.

⁹ Josh. iv.

¹ 1 Sam. vii. 12.

ezer (the stone of help), saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.

The visible Church of God is thus a perpetual memorial of invisible things, in a world that walks by sight, and a constant witness from age to age, even before the eyes of men, of the great facts and truths of our holy religion. The mere material "houses of God²," that are raised every where through the length and breadth of our Christian land, answer this blessed purpose in no inconsiderable degree. The spire or tower which shows itself above the trees or clustering houses, testifies silently of the things of another world; and the mere sound of "the church-going bell" breaks in upon the current of worldly thoughts, and suggests the things which concern our peace. And this is one reason why every house of God should be distinguished in style and character from common buildings, that it may the more strikingly remind us of holy truths. In like manner the presence of a clergyman or minister of God in every parish is itself a continual memorial or memento for God, and for the soul; and every minister of God should, on this account, (among many other reasons,) keep himself disentangled, as much as possible, from the things of this world³, that he may the more singly and continually be a witness for unseen things, among those who are so eager for the things of time and sense.

The creeds and ordinances of the Church are, however, the great pillars and monuments of Divine truths. The creeds which have been recited in the Church for so many generations, are standing witnesses for the great fact, that faith in all the mysteries contained in them has ever been professed in the countless congregations of Christendom. The great ordinance of the Lord's day is a monument of the fact, that God in six days created the heaven and the earth, and rested on the seventh; and of the other glorious truth,

² Ps. lxxiv. 8.

³ 2 Tim. ii. 4.

that, "as it began to dawn towards the first day of the week ⁴," our blessed Lord rose from the dead. The other festivals of the Church are monuments from year to year of the events which they severally commemorate. The sacrament of Baptism is a visible sign or emblem of the great truth, that a Christian must die to sin, and rise again to righteousness. In the Lord's Supper, as often as we eat that bread, and drink that cup, we show forth the Lord's death, till He come ⁵. Thereby also we visibly declare our faith in the necessity of feeding on that flesh which He gave for the life of the world ⁶. And thus the two holy sacraments (independently of the more high and mysterious benefits which they convey to us) are standing "pillars" or monuments of the chief truths of our holy faith.

They know little of human nature, and are little sensible of the benefits which they have derived from the Church of God, who do not habitually bless Him for having thus set up in the world a visible "pillar and stay" for the truth, and who do not earnestly strive that that pillar may stand as plainly and fully before the eyes of their children, as it has stood before their own. It is a sure sign of self-conceit, as well as of a shallow judgment, to disparage in any degree the value of any one of these monuments or memorials of sacred things which have been alluded to; and still more, to depreciate the value of the blessed fact itself, that God has established on earth a visible body of faithful men, to be a witness and keeper of holy writ, and "a pillar and stay of the truth," holding fast the form of sound words, which it received of the Apostles of the Lord; and by the Holy Ghost, who dwelleth in it, keeping that good thing which was committed to it ⁷.

⁴ Matt. xxviii. 1.

⁶ John vi. 51.

⁵ 1 Cor. xi. 26.

⁷ 2 Tim. i. 13, 14.

XXXI.—THE FAITHFUL MIRROR.

"If any man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." James i. 23—25.—See also Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24. Isa. xlv. 20.

WHEN I behold my natural face in a glass, let me remember that God has given me a mirror, in which I may see the true character of my soul; in order that I may grow in self-knowledge and may adorn myself, not with what ministers to pride and worldly vanity, but with the ornaments of meekness and holiness, which are of great price in His sight. This mirror is His holy word; which holds up to us the true lineaments and features of the soul; and shows us how greatly it has lost the beauty of the image and likeness of God; and how it is disgraced and deformed by spots and blemishes of sin. The swellings of pride, and the lines of envy, and carefulness, and the shades of sensuality, sloth, and earthliness, appear too plainly, when I look into this faithful mirror; which is not like flattering friends who say smooth things to us, and sometimes puff us up with the notion that we are clothed with various Christian graces; but it tells us the very truth concerning our spiritual state: and no veil of false excuses, or artful cloaking and colouring of our faults, will disguise from us our true state, if only we never neglect to consult this mirror in sincerity, and with earnest prayer.

It is not pleasant, indeed, to those who have fancied themselves^a rich in virtue, and increased in goods, and that they have need of nothing, to find that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; that, instead of the moral beauty in which

^a Rev. iii. 17.

they seemed to themselves to shine before God, they are indeed full of imperfections; their holiest things full of iniquity⁹. And therefore, men too often turn away from this mirror, and consult some more flattering glass. But what will be the end of such miserable self-deception? Let me sincerely desire to know the truth; that so I may ever walk humbly with my God, and strive heartily that the beauty of the Lord my God may be upon me¹; and that I may really be renewed in the image of Him that made me²!

And as there are many who do, indeed, behold themselves in this glass, but go away and turn to no good account the lessons which it so faithfully gives; let me beware of being only a forgetful hearer of the word. Holy Scripture compares such an one to “a man who beholdeth his natural face in a glass; but goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.” The recollection of what is presented to us in the mirror of truth, must not thus fade away from our mind; but it must so abide with us as to influence our character, and conduct. “For (the Apostle proceeds) whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein;” that is, who looks continually into this glass, and suffers its truths to abide upon his mind; “he, being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

XXXII.—THE SPIDER’S WEB.

“The hypocrite’s hope shall perish: whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider’s web. He shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand: he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure.”
Job viii. 13—15.—See also Prov. xxx. 28.

THE spider weaves its web out of its own bowels, and with wonderful skill prepares a net-work which far sur-

⁹ Exod. xxviii. 38.

¹ Ps. xc. 17.

² Col. iii. 10.

passes the most curious product of human workmanship in the regularity and fineness of its texture. It is said of her, that "she taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces." She succeeds in fixing herself even in the mansions of the great, and clings tenaciously to the haunt or home which she has chosen. Her web is admirably woven for the purpose which she has in view; and such insects as are incautiously entangled in it, become an easy prey to their artful enemy. Yet is it also so frail and slight that a breath might rend it; and at last it is brushed away in a moment.

And such, says Bildad in the Book of Job, is the hypocrite's hope. And all ages confirm that which is thus declared in what is perhaps the most ancient writing that exists. The hypocrite's hope is spun out of his own fancies, as the spider's web out of her own bowels; and it consists either in a groundless conceit of his own merits, or in an equally erroneous notion of God's character. By art and subtlety, however, he often succeeds in gaining his end; which is, to obtain the praise of men, and a large share of earthly prosperity. The skill which he shows for so unworthy a purpose, would be admirable, if it were applied to a nobler end; and he succeeds both in displacing the rivals who obstruct his path, and in preying upon any from whom he can get gain. Many have reason to curse the day when they were entangled in his snares; while he, for a long time, continues to keep his hold on men's good opinion; and little thinks how suddenly his fine web will be swept away, and himself be carried off with it by the besom of destruction.

At length, his false pretences no longer serve to deceive; and the hope in which he trusted, fails him, when he most needs its comfort. For the most part, even in this world, he is seen through; and he lies down in shame, and sorrow. But even if his falseness is not made evident here on earth, the Great Day will bring all hidden things to light; and the spider's web is not so quickly and so hopelessly crushed in a moment, as will

be the trust and confidence of all such as have been unfaithful with God.

O Lord ! who requirest "truth in the inward parts³," save me, I beseech Thee, from "all false ways⁴," and the vain sophistries of a self-deceiving heart. Give me that true singleness of heart, and simplicity of purpose, which distinguished that faithful servant, of whom his Master said, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile⁵!"

XXXIII.—THE NEGLECTED HOUSE.

"By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through." Eccles. x. 18.—See also Prov. xxii. 13; xxiv. 30.

SOME twelve months must have slipped away, since, in one of our summer walks, we visited yon ancient mansion for the first time. We noticed then, that the rain had been suffered to find its way through several places of the roof; and that there were many signs of decay throughout the deserted chambers.

A few months afterwards, we were here again, and observed fresh proof of a ruinous neglect on the part of the absent owner of this mansion. And now that a winter has passed over the neglected building, we see that what it took long time to raise, is rapidly perishing; and that if no means are taken to repair the breaches, the house must soon become an utter ruin.

My child, while you grieve to see a noble mansion thus falling to decay, you may learn an useful lesson from such an instance of slothfulness, and neglect. Yonder house has not fallen to ruin on a sudden: but the damage began by neglecting to repair some trifling breach, a tile that was out of its place, or a gutter that required to be examined, and made good.

Thus it was that the rain found its way to the timbers, which soon rot, if not properly protected from it. It

³ Ps. li. 6.

⁴ Ps. cxix. 104.

⁵ John i. 47.

then penetrated the walls, and the cement was weakened, and the plaster began to fall off; and the building became unsafe, and its breaches so great that it is now hardly worth the labour, and expense, to stop them.

Even so it is that vice insinuates itself by degrees into the soul, and grows upon us by almost insensible advances. Men do not fall at once into enormous sins, after leading pure and holy lives; but they begin by neglecting prayer, or allowing themselves in small deviations from the law of truth, or purity, or honesty; and thus, as the firmness of their resolutions is continually undermined, the signs of spiritual decay become more apparent, and they often end in some utter and fearful fall. "O how suddenly do they consume, perish, and come to a fearful end!"

The devil knows well that it would be useless to tempt a holy man with some flagrant and enormous sin, which would at once shock him by its grossness, and put him on his guard. He, therefore, tempts him to little declensions, and such shortcomings, in the exactness and strictness of his walk, as are scarcely perceptible at first, but lead, surely, to more palpable inconsistencies.

Remember, then, that a little care and vigilance in the beginning would, by God's gracious help, check this fatal progress of decay; and think how shameful it would be, if, through sloth in the beginning of temptation, we should suffer the breaches in the soul by degrees to become so great that it might seem a hopeless endeavour to repair them. Then, like a ruinous house, that is dangerous to all who shelter themselves under its roof, we shall be unprofitable to all around us, as well as lost to good ourselves.

⁶ Ps. lxx.ii. 19.

XXXIV.—THE RUSH, OR FLAG.

“Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water? Whilst it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb. So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite’s hope shall perish.” Job viii. 11—13.—See also Job xx. 5. Matt. vi. 2.

If you consider the rush, or flag, by yonder water-course, you will see another emblem of that delusive hope which is likened to the spider’s web⁷. It springs out of the mire; and its growth is as rapid as its greenness is bright “before the sun.” While the bed in which it grows is filled with the seasonable rains, it flaunts itself as if in scorn of the more valuable blade in the neighbouring furrow, and gains more notice from the un-instructed eye. Yet it is always a worthless plant; and as soon as the torrent is dried up by the heat of summer, it withers in a day. “Whilst it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb. So,” says the inspired writer, recording the words of Bildad, “are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite’s hope shall perish.”

The hypocrite must have some rotten ground from which his hope may spring, as the flag out of the mire. This is either his false profession of religion, or a vain conceit of his own goodness, or a miserable trust in his present prosperity. It is a rotten ground, but it answers his purpose for a time. He is “green before the sun⁸,” and may seem, even like a tree of the forest, to wrap his roots about the stones. But he is always worthless and unprofitable; and often, when he least expects it, is found out to be a hollow pretender, and a poor counterfeit. He finds that forgetfulness of God is a fatal folly; and, in the season of shame and disgrace, repents bitterly that he did not root and ground⁹ himself in a surer soil, and bear such fruits as might have endured the searching trial which they were sure to undergo.

⁷ Similitude xxxii. Second Series. ⁸ Job viii. 16, 17. ⁹ Eph. iii. 17.

XXXV.—THE PITCHER BROKEN AT THE FOUNTAIN,
AND OTHER EMBLEMS OF OLD AGE.

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: in the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, and the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low; also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond-tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” Eccles. xii. 1—7.

MEN put off the recollection of God, in the days of youth and strength, with an idea that they will not only have leisure but inclination to give themselves up to that serious duty, in the season of old age. To show the danger and vanity of this notion, Solomon reminds us of the calamities and infirmities of old age, by a great variety of figures or images which are not without some little obscurity to us, though their general meaning is plain, and they are full of touching and simple beauty.

The infirmities of old age are often such that men have then “no pleasure” in their days. “The sun,” and “the light,” and “the moon,” and “the stars,” are then “darkened.” Men are then unable to enjoy the pleasantness of the light, and the beauties of nature, as formerly. Or rather, perhaps, the meaning is, the judgment, and memory, and imagination, those lights of the mind, are so impaired that they seem to be darkened, and extinguished. “The clouds also return after rain.” In youth, when the season of affliction was past, the soul was able again to feel the sunshine of joy; but now the rain is no sooner over, than the

clouds return, and no interval of comfort or enjoyment is experienced.

“The keepers of the house tremble.” The hands and arms with which men defend themselves from assaults and accidents are now so feeble, that the house (the body) is exposed to continual danger. “The strong men bow themselves.” The shoulders, which were equal to almost any load, are now so bowed with continual weakness, that even “the grasshopper is a burden.” Or perhaps this means, that the legs which were once so active in their spring and tread, have now so lost their power, that instead of bearing the body unweariedly from place to place, they are themselves a burden; and can with difficulty be moved, one before the other.

“The grinders cease, because they are few.” And “the doors are shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low.” The teeth are now few, and incapable of fulfilling their office; and the voice also has in consequence become so indistinct that the door of the lips is not opened as formerly in the great assembly. “All the daughters of musick are brought low.” The ears, as well as the voice, have lost their capacity for the pleasure of music; and the mere “voice of a bird” is now sufficient to startle the ear that took delight in the swelling notes of those who play well on instruments. “Those also that look out of the windows are darkened.” The eyes by which the soul looked forth as from a window on the beauties of nature, are now so dim that they are to a great degree unserviceable. The aged person is afraid of “that which is high;” the least ascent in his path, or the many accidents that may befall him when he goes forth abroad. His head is become white and hoary, like an almond-tree.

And at length his declining powers fail altogether to perform their office; and the mourners going about the streets proclaim that “desire has indeed ceased;” and that the period of suffering and infirmity is closed.

"The silver cord is loosed." The mysterious bond by which the soul was united to the body is now dissolved; and the delicate nerves by which sensation was conveyed to the brain, are now relaxed for ever. "The golden bowl is broken," and "the pitcher is broken at the fountain." The heart which is the well or reservoir of the blood, out of which it is, so to say, drawn in a bowl or pitcher, and thus made to circulate through the veins, now fails to supply the living stream. The lungs cease to play, the heart to beat, the blood to circulate; just as when a pitcher is broken at a fountain, or a wheel at a cistern, the water can no longer be drawn up. And thus "the body returns to the earth as it was; and the spirit returns to God who gave it."

How unsuitable then is the period of old age to a work which requires so earnest an exertion of all our faculties, as the work of remembering our duty to our Creator, and preparing for death, and judgment! How needful is it to apply ourselves to this most necessary duty, while we have yet the use of our various powers, and may glorify God by using them in His service! Let those sacred admonitions sink into our hearts, "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work¹." And, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest²."

XXXVI.—THE EARLY WORKMAN.

"I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and mend your doings." Jer. xxxv. 15.—See also Jer. xxv. 4. Luke x. 16; xx. 9.

My child, long before your head had left its pillow,

¹ John ix. 4.

² Eccles. ix. 10.

our neighbour was busily employed upon his daily task. With the first dawn of daylight in the east, he rose from his scanty rest, and resumed with cheerful industry the work which he had left unfinished. No longer than was absolutely necessary for exhausted nature did he "give sleep to his eyes, and slumber to his eyelids³." While spirits less earnest than his own were still buried in the forgetfulness of sleep; and few, not bound by necessary duty to such early wakefulness, were yet abroad; he had made good way in the employment which he is so anxious to accomplish. Is it zeal for the progress of some important work that prompts him to such unusual sacrifice of welcome and refreshing rest? or is it his tender concern for those who are dearest to him, and his earnest desire to provide for them what is necessary to their welfare, or enjoyment? Perhaps some afflicted relative is supported by the proceeds of these hours which he gains from sleep; or the earnings are wanted for the education of some beloved son, for whose sake the father thus willingly denies himself, and thinks nothing of his toil, while working for the child of his affections. Or it may be, that he is "constrained" thus to "spend himself," in order to earn, in these additional hours, the means which he would not otherwise possess of contributing to the relief of Christ's poorer members, or to the propagation of His Gospel among the heathen. If this be the holy purpose for which he thus "rises early," how heavenly must be the peace of his heart, as he busily plies his task! and how happy must be his consciousness that he is serving the best of masters; and permitted thus to testify to Him by a willing service the sincerity of his love! In any wise, he is a pattern to us of industry, and patient self-denial; and reminds us how much may be done by abridging at times the hours which we allot to sleep. Let us learn of him that zeal must show

³ Ps. cxxxii. 4.

itself not in word, but in deed; and be persuaded that we never work so well (whether it be in the work of prayer and praise, or in the daily duties of our calling,) as when we act in the spirit of the Psalmist's resolution with respect to prayer: "My voice shalt Thou hear betimes, O Lord! early in the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up⁴."

But there is yet a holier and a more blessed lesson which the instance of one thus early at his daily work suggests to us. God has been pleased to borrow the terms, descriptive properly of such earnestness in labour as we have noted, and to apply them as an illustration of His own dealings with His rebellious creatures. He uses the case of one thus zealous and earnest in self-sacrifice, as a figure or similitude of His own unspeakable mercy, His Divine zeal, and His ceaseless endeavours to win us to our own happiness. "I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not⁵." And again, "The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling-place⁶." Praise is given in Scripture to the virtuous woman, who riseth while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens⁷; and we see what an instance of love was shown by the holy women, who had indeed rested on the Sabbath-day in dutiful observance of the law, but were "very early in the morning" at the sepulchre⁸; "when it was yet dark⁹;" "at the rising of the sun¹," in order to show all honour in their power to the lifeless body of their Blessed Master. In such instances as these, or, when you are yourself stirred up by some special cause to any unusual exertion, or self-sacrifice, remember that God has given us herein an image of His own un-

⁴ Ps. v. 3.⁵ Jer. vii. 13.⁶ 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15.⁷ Prov. xxxi. 10. 15.⁸ Luke xxiv. 1.⁹ John xx. 1.¹ Mark xvi. 2.

wearied love, in preparing the way of our salvation; and of His own ceaseless endeavours to persuade us to walk in it. It was an instance of this mercy, when our Saviour, in the exercise of that zeal which even consumed Him, "rising up a great while before day, went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed²." And it is written: "He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned³." We need to be awakened day by day, or we should soon sleep the sleep of death in sins and trespasses. It is God who wakens us morning by morning; "rising early" (for thus He authorizes us to say with reverence), that He may thus "waken our ear to hear as the learned;" in other words, that we may readily and meekly receive instruction, and not be like those who refuse to learn. May such an image of His compassion indeed awaken us to the call of duty; and may we thus "prevent the dawning of the morning," that we "may meditate in His word⁴!"

XXXVII.—THE WATCHMAN ON THE HEIGHT.

"He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come." Isa. xxi. 11, 12.—See also Isa. lvi. 10. Ezek. iii. 17. Hab. ii. 1. Heb. xiii. 17.

THERE is a mound on the brow of yonder hill that swells so proudly from the woodland below. It marks the spot where a watchman was placed in time of war, and a beacon constructed, that, in case of invasion, an alarm might speedily be given, and the means of repelling the enemy might be provided in time⁵. From such a danger the gracious providence of God protected this favoured land—and let us trust

² Mark i. 35.

³ Isa. i. 4.

⁴ Ps. cxix. 147, 148.

⁵ A hill near the writer's home, in one of the southern counties, is here alluded to.

and pray that the same over-ruling hand may ever thus protect it—but while the apprehension existed, it may be that many an anxious eye was daily directed towards the beacon on the height; and many a heart was anxious to inquire, like the Edomite of old, “Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?” What tidings do you give us of the night? has any fresh symptom of danger shown itself? or, may we again apply ourselves with fearless diligence to our daily duties and occupations?

It does not appear certain on what occasion the watchman of old was thus interrogated by the Edomite from Mount Seir. It is probable that the prophet Isaiah found himself in vision thus questioned, in his character of a watchman for the city of God, by one of the enemies of God’s people. He is asked how long the night should yet continue; that is, perhaps, the night of the Babylonish captivity; during which, not the land of Israel only, but the surrounding nations also, were oppressed by the power of the Assyrian empire. The Edomite, it may be, inquires how much of this period of affliction was yet to come? in what degree was it passing away? And to such an inquiry, the Prophet seems to reply by an assurance that the morning was indeed at hand—the morning of deliverance; which, however, would be succeeded by a night of sorrow to all those who should not have profited by the opportunity afforded for returning unto God. And he adds the warning, “If ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come;” that is, inquire in earnest; with a real purpose to learn the way of salvation; return to God in truth and sincerity; come without delay, and receive the lessons of true wisdom.

There is some obscurity in this passage of Holy Scripture; and yet it brings before us with singular force the office of God’s ministers, and the earnestness with which the people should inquire of them the warnings, or counsels, which they are appointed to deliver.

A minister of God is as a watchman on the height; withdrawn from such entanglements as would hinder him in his responsible office; raised above the din and throng of common earthly cares and pursuits; and devoted to the great work of watching over the welfare of such part of the walls and bulwarks⁶ of God's city as may be entrusted to his charge. As the watchman must wake, while others sleep, so the minister of God must be ever intent on the things of another world, and on the spiritual dangers by which the city of God is beset; while others are necessarily more engaged in the common concerns of life. It is his office to give early and effectual warning of any perils which may affect either those sacred truths of which the Church is the keeper and the witness, or the holiness of its members. He must warn those who "sleep," that the "night is far spent, and the day is at hand⁷." And he must assure others who inquire either with insincerity of heart, or on needless points which it is beyond his province to explain, that it is vain to inquire, unless they ask with a real intention of returning truly to God, in the way of practical repentance and amendment. If any faint and are weary with the long continuance of a "night" of sorrow, he must cheer and comfort them with the assurance, that though "heaviness may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning⁸;" whereas to such as presume on the continuance of the bright and shining morning he must give the solemn warning, Work while it is day: "the night cometh, when no man can work⁹."

That he may thus rebuke, instruct, console, or warn, the people entrusted to him, the Christian watchman must accustom himself, by prayer and meditation, to discern the "signs of the times¹," the counsels of Holy Scripture, the dealings of Divine Providence, and also the devices of Satan². He

⁶ Ps. xlviii. 12, 13.⁷ Rom. xiii. 12.⁸ Ps. xxx. 5.⁹ John ix. 4.¹ Matt. xvi. 3.² 2 Cor. ii. 11.

must know his own heart, and his own weakness, that he may know the hearts, and feel for the weakness, of others. He must endure patiently the present chequered condition of human affairs; but long earnestly for the dawn of that long-expected day when the Lord Jesus shall come again with glory, and the number of God's elect shall be accomplished.

Let us bless God that He has set apart an order of men thus to "watch for our souls, as those that must give account." Let us be anxious to know what message they have to deliver; and ready both to receive their warnings of any fault, or spiritual danger, with meekness, and gratitude; and also to follow their godly admonitions with a teachable and reverent mind. And be it our care to pray that their eyes may be opened to see what we are all so much concerned in their rightly understanding; so that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; as knowing that "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain ³."

XXXVIII.—THE GRAVER'S TOOL.

"Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!" Job xix. 23, 24.—See also Exod. xxxii. 16. Jer. xvii. 1. 2 Cor. iii. 3.

How deeply and indelibly have those sentences been cut in the solid stone by the graver's tool! They may be exposed for ages to the changes of the climate without losing their sharpness, and precision. The most violent and ceaseless rains will not wash away those deep and enduring characters for centuries to come. They are well calculated for the purpose which they are intended to answer, of conveying to coming generations a solemn and important record.

³ Ps. cxvii. 1.

It is thus that we should wish that the truths of Scripture, and especially the Law of God, might be so deeply engraven on our hearts that nothing might ever efface the characters. We know that that Law was written of old on tables of stone; and the Apostle intimates that it is now written by the Spirit, not on tables of stone, but on "fleshly tables of the heart." And thus our Church teaches us to pray that God, in compliance with our earnest supplication, would write all these His laws in our hearts.

Be pleased, O Lord, to write them, not so that the characters may be washed out by "the floods of ungodliness," and temptation; but so that they may endure through the many changes of joy and sorrow, of difficulty and trial, to which we may be exposed in this mortal life. Write them so that they may be "known and read of all men⁴," by the unmistakeable character of a life led after the example of Christ, and reflecting something of His image.

How glorious and consoling was that truth, with especial reference to which Job wished that his words might be graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! Its preciousness may be now less felt, because its certainty is more generally acknowledged; but it is indeed that truth, in the power of which every Christian must wish both to live and die. "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another⁵."

⁴ 2 Cor. iii. 2.

⁵ Job xix. 25—27.

XXXIX.—PERVERSE CHILDREN.

“And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the market-place, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept.” Luke vii. 31, 32.—See also Isa. v. 4. Luke xiii. 34. 1 Cor. ix. 19—22.

WHO that notices the ways of children has not seen instances in which some perverse and sullen humour has spoilt the innocent glee of a festive occasion? A few children, it may be, of a wayward and wilful disposition, have marred the enjoyment of a whole party by their perverse unwillingness to enter into the efforts that were made to please them: and though such of the company as were sweet-tempered and yielding have tried every means to win the others to be social, and happy, yet these have persisted in their sullen humour, and have refused to answer to the touch of affection, or the persuasions of reason.

He who was ever intent on drawing lessons of wisdom from all that came before Him, perceived the resemblance between the temper of such perverse children and the way in which too many, who are no longer children in years, receive all the efforts of their Heavenly Father to win them to happiness. “Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the market-place, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of Publicans and sinners! But wisdom is justified of all her children.”

The use of pipes was common, both on festive and on mournful occasions; and our Lord, in this similitude, seems to have before Him the case of children

representing in their play, first, the festivity of a marriage, and then the lamentations of a funeral; but unable to get their companions to join them in either pastime. He thus implies how various are the means by which God endeavours to awaken us to repentance, and to draw us to Himself. He strikes, as it were, on various chords; He touches many a spring, in order to rouse us from our stupid unconcern, and win us to be happy. He sent, first, John the Baptist, a man of secluded life, and most austere habits; knowing that such habits in their minister have influence with some who would hardly listen to a person of a different turn of mind. On the other hand, since many are prejudiced against religion, when set before them in its austerer character, our Blessed Saviour was pleased to conform Himself in a greater degree than was the case with John, to the ways and usages of common life; and He exhibited religion under a milder and a more winning aspect. And thus does He still adapt His dealings with us to our various tempers, characters, and circumstances. He touches some chord that should move us to godly sorrow; or some other that should raise us to sacred joy; or displays His awful Majesty, to excite our reverence, or His winning mercy, to awaken our love.

But under this image our Lord implies, also, how perversely we receive His gracious endeavours; even like fretful children, who will not be pleased or persuaded. Some wrong construction is put upon all that He does; just as the Pharisees of old misrepresented both the austerity of John, and our Lord's conformity to common usage. We are indeed as children, foolish and trifling; eager, like children, after present things; like children, sitting idle in the market-place, and playing when God bids us "work in His vineyard;" and, what is more, perverse, like children, unwilling to be won, and still finding some reason or other for disregarding the message which is sent to us. Either we say, The minister is too strict.

and severe; or else, he is too easy and indulgent; or, he belongs to a different party from ours; or, his personal faults throw discredit on his doctrine. Instead of being like the strings of an instrument, that answer to every touch, and yield the sounds which the player wishes to awaken, we are so dead that no appeal can rouse us. Instead of being duly affected by the reasoning addressed to us, our reason is clogged and clouded with mists of passion and prejudice; so that it either fails to see what is truth, or has not candour to acknowledge it.

The true cause of all this is the perverseness of the heart; which is skilful in finding excuses for what it has no mind to do. Let us call on God to sweeten this bitter water, and heal this barren soil. "Wisdom is justified of all her children." There are those who are not thus perverse; children of heavenly wisdom. They are not children in understanding⁶, nor in frowardness; but in teachableness, and innocence⁷. And they "justify" the wisdom of God by showing, in their life and conversation, how suitable are the means provided for man's recovery to the end which God has in view. May we be found sitting at the gates of wisdom, and watching at the posts of her doors⁸! In this case, our companions will be among the poor in spirit, and simple in heart; but the eye of our soul will become more clear and piercing; and our heart will answer more readily to every touch and motion of God's Holy Spirit.

XL.—THE FALLING STAR.

"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!"

Isa. xiv. 12.—See also Ezek. xxxii. 7. Dan. viii. 10. Matt. xxiv. 29. Rev. viii. 10; ix. 1.

No wonder, my child, that you bid me look at the

⁶ 1 Cor. xiv. 20. ⁷ Ps. cxxxi. 2. Matt. xviii. 2, 3. ⁸ Prov. viii. 34.

falling star. I marked what struck your sight, and drew from you such expression of amazement. It seemed as if one of the brightest jewels in yonder crown of night had been suddenly struck from the diadem, and cast headlong to the earth. It shot from the height of heaven through the clear expanse; and though its light was as brilliant as ever while it fell, yet in an instant it seemed to be put out for ever.

What you saw was but a meteor, which is not uncommon in certain states of the atmosphere; and has given rise to a sublime and awful application of the scriptural similitude, by which such beings as are highly exalted, whether in heaven, or in earth, are likened to the "stars of light".

As the honour of such beings as "excel in strength," or holiness, in earth, or heaven, or are exalted by office, or station, above their fellows, is thus set forth to us; so the notion of a "falling star" is used to convey to us a lively sense of the downfall of those whom God casts down from their eminency; and the decline of such as "keep not their first estate"⁹ of purity and brightness. Thus the prophet Isaiah, when speaking of the pride and the downfall of the king of Babylon, compares that awful change to the fall of the morning star from its place in heaven. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit"¹¹. Pride and ambition were probably the chief occasion of the downfall of the apostate angels; as they certainly were the sins which provoked the Lord to break the power of the king of

⁹ See Similitude xlii. Second Series.

¹⁰ Jude 6.

¹¹ Isa. xiv. 12—15.

Babylon, and tread him under foot. And in such a case, the greatness and awfulness of the fall is measured by the brightness and splendour of the former glory. Of all earthly changes, the downfall of the kingdom of Babylon was, perhaps, one of the most memorable; warning us against that pride, vain glory, and oppression, which are so utterly unsuited to a frail creature like man, and unspeakably offensive to the Most High. But the fall of "the angels which kept not their first estate" is also held forth to us as a warning and a lesson; and may teach the purest and the best among us, that there is no height of holiness or station from which they may not fall, if they suffer themselves to be lifted up by pride, and forget their continual need of God's grace. And the downfall in such a case is like a falling star. It is the extinction of a bright and shining light¹. The figure is used several times in the Revelation of St. John; and seems also to have been employed by our Lord in His prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, as typical of the day of judgment. And though we may not fully understand its prophetic or symbolical meaning, yet this use of it in Holy Scripture will lead us to muse, with awe and reverence, even on such an instance as you have witnessed of a common phenomenon. Such an instance may well suggest a prayer for those who are raised to stations of honour, that they may be preserved from pride; and for those who have great gifts of holiness, and usefulness, that they may be kept from falling². Shall we not also bless God if a lowlier station saves us from many temptations of this kind; and, while we watch and pray lest we fall from the grace that has been given us, remember also that we must strive to let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven? We should remind ourselves that a Christian's office is not only to try to strengthen such as stand, but also to raise and restore the fallen; and

¹ Matt. xxiv. 29. John v. 35.

² Jude 24.

that they who shall turn many to righteousness, shall at last shine as the stars for ever and ever³.

XLI.—THE NAIL IN A SURE PLACE.

“And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place.” Isa. xxii. 23.—See also Ezra ix. 8.

MANY a poor man's cottage in England is better provided with furniture, and things which we think essential to comfort, than is the case with the palaces of the great in Eastern countries. In that part of the world, the climate enables people to dispense with much that is thought necessary to a home in northern latitudes; and such furniture as is there seen, even in the dwellings of the wealthy, is of a far simpler and ruder kind than would here be found in houses of a corresponding class. Thus, in those countries, it is common for things to be laid on shelves or on brackets fastened to the wall, which with us would be enclosed in chests or cabinets. And even a nail or spike projecting from the side of an apartment, is made to answer the purpose of far more costly and ingenious contrivances among ourselves.

Thus it is necessary that the several rooms should be provided with nails or brackets of this kind, not only sufficiently strong themselves, but also so fixed into the walls as to bear a considerable weight. And as these walls are commonly built of mud or clay, it is necessary that the nails should be laid in the walls while they are being raised, and should also extend through their entire thickness; or else any considerable weight would only tear down a wall constructed of materials so little solid, or durable.

This account will help us to understand what is meant where God says of His servant Eliakim, “I

³ Dan. xii. 3.

will fasten him as a nail in a sure place⁴." In other words, I will so build him into My spiritual Temple, that he may himself be fixed in it securely, and that others also may safely depend on him for help and counsel. In like manner, in Ezra's acknowledgment of God's mercy in the restoration from Babylon, he says, that "grace hath been showed from the Lord our God . . . to give us a nail in His holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage." The expression seems to mean a firm support (by the rebuilding of the temple) on which the Church might hang its hopes and interests. And as Eliakim⁵ appears to be a figure or emblem of Christ (and the temple was undoubtedly a type of Him), we have in this similitude an instructive lesson, both of our duty, and our happiness. On Him we must hang, as it were, our hopes, and interests, both with respect to our own salvation, and to the peace and prosperity of our Church. "My soul hangeth upon Thee⁶," says David: and his words describe the feelings of every true Christian. To Christ we must commit the keeping of our souls in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator⁷: and we shall find Him such a stay as will never fail those who hang their hopes upon Him. He is as "a nail fastened in a sure place;" and the covenant of which He is the Mediator, is "the sure mercies of David⁸." Whatever else men hang their hopes upon will be "like a spider's web⁹," or "a tottering wall¹." On Him only can we depend with safety for all we need in time and in eternity.

⁴ Isa. xxii. 23.⁵ See the next Similitude.⁶ Ps. lxiii. 9.⁷ 1 Pet. iv. 19.⁸ Isa. lv.⁹ Job viii. 14.¹ Ps. lxii. 3.

XLII.—THE KEY OF THE HOUSE OF DAVID.

“And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.” Isa. xxii. 22.—See also Isa. ix. 6. Matt. xvi. 19. Rev. iii. 7.

A KEY has often been the ensign of office, either sacred or civil²; and appears in this case to have been borne or hung upon the shoulder. It is said of Messiah³, that “the government shall be upon his shoulder:” that is, the ensign of government; the rod, or sceptre, or, probably, the key, which was the symbol of authority, shall be upon his shoulder. And God says of Eliakim⁴, who is said by some to have been a type of the Messiah: “And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; and he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.” We can easily imagine that, in the rude contrivances of early art, the key was commonly of much larger size than is the case at present. Its form is said to have frequently resembled a sickle, and thus it would not unnaturally be borne upon the shoulder. When borne as an ensign of office, it was probably made of gold, or of some other costly material: and the exclusive authority to shut, or open, was significant of unlimited power. We should remember the use which our Lord made of the same figure, when He said to St. Peter: “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven⁵.” And, indeed, He has sanctioned the belief that Eliakim was intended as a type of Messiah, by applying to Himself the very words which had been used to intimate the authority that was conferred on Eliakim. Not only does He say of Himself, “I have the keys of hell and of death⁶:” but He also describes Himself, as “He

² See Bp. Lowth’s note on Isa. xxii. 22.

⁴ Isa. xxii. 22.

⁵ Matt. xvi. 19.

³ Isa. ix. 6.

⁶ Rev. i. 18.

that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth⁷."

The application, then, of this figure to our Saviour is intended to teach us, that all power in heaven and earth⁸ is committed unto Him, as God Incarnate. It is He that openeth the kingdom of heaven, by the key of holy baptism, and by the door of faith, and repentance. It is He that openeth the door of ministerial usefulness to His faithful servants. Thus St. Paul says, "a great door and effectual is opened to me⁹;" and again; "A door was opened to me of the Lord¹⁰." It is He alone who can unlock the heart and the understanding of men¹¹, which are closed by the barriers of pride, and prejudice, and sensuality, so that the word which giveth light and understanding to the simple may find an entrance¹². He openeth also the Scriptures¹³, which are as a sealed book¹⁴, to such as are unenlightened by His grace. And He will hereafter open the gates¹⁵ of hell and death, that all who sleep may come forth; and that while His saints are clothed with immortality and incorruption¹⁶, the wicked may rise to shame and everlasting contempt¹⁷.

Let us not forget that He also "shutteth, and no man can open." He shutteth up the heart¹⁸ that hardens itself against Him; and He will shut out of His kingdom¹⁹ all those who have rejected His grace.

What prayer can be more suitable, than that He will here "open" to us "the gates of righteousness¹;" and hereafter, the gates of the bright city²; that we "may go in to them and praise the Lord?"

⁷ Rev. iii. 7.

⁹ 1 Cor. xvi. 9.

¹¹ Luke xxiv. 45. Acts xvi. 14.

¹³ 2 Cor. iii. 12—18.

¹⁵ Matt. xvi. 18.

¹⁷ Dan. xii. 2.

¹ Ps. cxviii. 19.

⁸ Matt. xxviii. 18.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. ii. 12.

¹² Ps. cxix. 130.

¹⁴ Isa. xxix. 11.

¹⁶ 1 Cor. xv. 53. 2 Cor. v. 4.

¹⁸ Isa. vi. 10.

¹⁹ Matt. xxv. 10.

² Rev. xxii. 14.

XLIII.—THE OAK IN WINTER.

“As a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves : so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.”
Isa. vi. 13.—See also Isa. lxx. 8, 9. Rom. xi. 5. 7.

THE last leaf has fallen from yonder oak. The smallest spray or twig in all the mighty branches now shows itself against the sky ; and one who had never seen the effect of returning spring³, might suppose that the tree were dead. We know that the principle of life remains in each branch that now seems lifeless, although the outward signs and tokens of life are suspended. When winter is over, the sap will again rise, and spread itself through every bough ; and the thick foliage will effectually screen us from the heat, if we then come to shelter ourselves under its shadow.

So is it with the Church of God. It was so with the Church of old. When God removed His people to a state of captivity at Babylon, and the re-establishment of their Church and nation in Judæa seemed a hopeless dream⁴, the eye of faith looked forward “with sure and certain hope” to that restoration which was promised. “The holy seed” was “the substance” of the Church. There was still “a remnant” of faithful Israelites ; and in that “holy seed” a living principle was hidden or laid up, which, beyond all human calculation, issued in the revival, and prosperity, of the Jewish Church⁵. God had “said of Cyrus, He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure ; even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built ; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid⁶.”

It is thus, also, with the Church of Christ. Cast out from those countries in which it first arose, and its very existence seeming from time to time to have been endangered by the invasion of heathen nations, or the prevalence of error, or the corruptions of secu-

³ Similitude xliv. First Series.

⁵ Ezra ix. 8.

⁴ Ps. cxxvi. 1.

⁶ Isa. xlv. 28.

larity, and superstition, it has still rooted itself anew in other lands, and put forth leaves like Aaron's rod⁷, and "bloomed blossoms," and "filled the face of the world with fruit⁸." "The holy seed" has been "the substance thereof." God has preserved "a little flock" of faithful servants: and the living principle has been, from age to age, conveyed by His Almighty grace, and by His blessing on His appointed ministry. Blessed be His Name that it is still as vigorous as ever; as powerful to bear, not only the leaves of outward profession⁹, but the rich fruits of righteousness and peace!

And so, likewise, as to that winter of death, by which one generation after another is overtaken and subdued: the eye of faith is able to rest upon a glorious revival¹, where the eye of sense sees nothing but tokens of dissolution, and decay. Even when we commit the remains of a departed brother to the dust, the voice of faith gives utterance to "a sure and certain hope of the resurrection unto eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto His glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby He is able to subdue all things to Himself²."

Thus is this leafless tree an emblem to us of glorious hopes. And there is yet another consoling reflection, which it may silently suggest to "the mind that museth upon many things." For, may it not suggest the thought, that in some who seem to be dead in trespasses and sins³, there may be a hidden seed, which yet may be quickened into life, and bear those fruits by which God is glorified? Amen; even so; do Thou, O Lord Jesus, breathe on such a soul, to raise it from its seeming death; and do Thou evermore breathe graciously on us, that the tokens of true life may more and more appear in us!

⁷ Numb. xvii. 8.

⁹ Mark xi. 13.

² Burial Service.

⁸ Isa. xxvii. 6.

¹ 1 Thess. iv. 13—18.

³ Eph. ii. 1.

**XLIV.—THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD COMPARED TO
GOADS AND NAILS.**

“The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.” Eccles. xii. 10, 11.—See also 2 Tim. ii. 15. Heb. iv. 12.

As the beast of burden that is sluggish, and disobedient, must be quickened and corrected by the goad, so does my sleeping conscience need the continual pricks and admonitions of a faithful expounder of Scripture, both for correction, and instruction in righteousness⁴. And as it is the use of “nails” to fasten what is loose, or what would otherwise drop to pieces, so the exhortation of a wise preacher should fix in my treacherous memory what I might otherwise soon “let slip⁵,” or make me cleave to those testimonies of eternal truth from which I am so apt to wander⁶. How great is the blessing of some wise and faithful “master of assemblies,” who is enabled rightly to divide the word of truth⁷, and to apply to the different characters in his congregation⁸ such texts of Holy Scripture as are severally suitable to them!

Let us, however, always remember that the power and wisdom of every faithful preacher is given “from one Shepherd;” who alone can effectually quicken such as are dead in sin, or knit our hearts unto Himself⁹, that we may fear His Name. If He be graciously pleased to quicken my sleeping conscience by the godly motions of His Spirit, let me not be found among those who “kick against the pricks¹,” but rather among those who, as soon as² they are pricked in their heart, inquire, with earnestness and sincerity, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” and not only forthwith give themselves up to obey the word which

⁴ 2 Tim. iii. 16.

⁵ Heb. ii. 1.

⁶ Ps. cxix. 31. Acts xi. 23.

⁷ 2 Tim. ii. 15.

⁸ Matt. xiii. 52; xxiv. 45.

⁹ Ps. lxxxvi. 11.

¹ Acts ix. 5.

² Acts ii. 37.

bids them repent, and believe the Gospel; but also make it their great business to hold fast the beginning of their confidence, stedfast unto the end³.

XLV.—THE SHAKING OF THE FRUIT-TREE.

“When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, there shall be as the shaking of an olive-tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done. They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord, they shall cry aloud from the sea.” Isa. xxiv. 13, 14.—See also Isa. xvii. 6. Matt. xx. 16.

THEY have been stripping yonder fruit-tree of its burden, and the work is nearly done. Scarcely can the baskets hold the fruit with which they are laden; so carefully have the gatherers gone over the boughs, and so completely have they plucked the ripe clusters. Once more they seem to be examining the vine, lest they should have left inadvertently any grapes under the foliage; and now they are bearing off its produce for sale, or other uses. Here and there, however, notwithstanding all their care, we can still see the purple fruit under the leaves of the utmost branches; and the toil of a diligent gleaner might even now be rewarded by the fruit which was unnoticed in the owner's search.

What we see is a scriptural emblem of God's dealings, both of judgment, and mercy. It was thus that by the flood He swept away a sinful generation, saving “only Noah, the eighth person⁴.” The few inmates of the ark were like the shaking of the olive-tree, or the gleaning grapes, when the vintage is done. Thus also He snatched Lot and his family as brands from the burning, in the destruction of Sodom. It was thus that in His judgments on the houses of Israel and Judah, a remnant only was saved, while the great

³ Heb. iii. 14.

⁴ 2 Pet. ii. 5.

majority of those sinful nations were plucked away from their land; and were either destroyed, or scattered over the face of the earth.

Surely, if we are spared in any general judgment, which perhaps carries off multitudes of our fellow-creatures, or involves vast numbers in one common calamity, we should remember that such preservation is due, not to our own merits, but to God's free and distinguishing grace. And we should acknowledge that "it is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed ⁵." There is still a remnant in the worst of times ⁶; and to that remnant we should earnestly endeavour to belong by the diligence with which we should make our calling and election sure ⁷. The prophet says of that remnant, which he compares to the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done, that "they shall lift up their voice, and sing for the majesty of the Lord." The sense of such free and unmerited mercy would kindle them to unusual devotion and thankfulness. May similar mercy have the same effect on us! And when we hear those thrilling words, "Many are called, but few chosen," let us bless God for the assurance that some at least "through grace obey His calling ⁸;" and pray also that we may ever strive to enter in at the strait gate; as knowing that "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it ⁹."

XLVI.—THE FALLEN TREE.

"If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be." Eccles. xi. 3.—See also Rev. xxii. 11.

THE sound of the woodman's axe gives note that some giant of the forest is about to fall: and now the

⁵ Lam. iii. 22.

⁸ Article xvii.

⁶ 1 Kings xix. 18.

⁷ 2 Pet. i. 10.

⁹ Matt. vii. 14.

crashing boughs tell plainly that the work is done, and the pride of the summer foliage is brought down to the ground. See what a gap is made in the screen of wood, and how the eye can now wander over the soft meadows, and the distant village, that were hid before ! Let us go towards the opening that is so apparent, and consider what solemn or useful reflections may be suggested by a sight of the fallen tree.

It lies in the direction in which it fell. While it still flourished in its pride and glory, the direction as well as the period of its fall was uncertain. It was possible that it might fall toward the north, or toward the south : nor was there any reason why it should not enjoy the sunshine, and the rain, through many a verdant summer. But the word was given that the axe should be laid unto its root ; and now the direction in which it should fall is no more a question. It is a fixed and unalterable fact. The period during which one or the other direction could have been given to its fall is past and gone for ever.

Surely a thought of unspeakable importance is thus suggested to us. The stroke of death fixes the direction and the character of our future and eternal state of being. Before that awful summons (as certain to arrive as the time of its arrival is uncertain) it is possible that we may depart to be with Christ¹, or, that we may die in our sins, and have our portion with the lost. The great question is not yet fixed : not so fixed but that on the one hand we need to be reminded of the danger of falling ; and on the other, are still in a capacity for receiving and obeying the gracious invitation that bids us turn, and live. Our character may yet, through grace, be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light² ; or it may, through a perverse rejection of God's mercy, become such as to make us ripe for destruction. Death terminates the period during which this

¹ Phil. i. 23.

² Col. i. 12.

possibility can continue. "In the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be." As to those who have undergone that awful change, may we not say, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still : and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still : and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still : and he that is holy, let him be holy still?" How affecting is it, as we stand beside the grave of some brother, or sister, to reflect that the season of probation is thus ended, and that the soul has passed into a state of existence, the character of which, for holiness, and happiness, or for wickedness, and misery, is fixed for ever ! and how wise is it to reflect, that surviving friends will soon stand beside our own grave ; and so to apply ourselves to the great work of preparing for the change, that their grief at our departure may be hallowed and soothed by the blessed hope that we have fallen asleep in the Lord, and are awaiting a joyful resurrection ! Grant, O Lord, that it may be thus with us, of thine infinite mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord !

XLVII.—SALT.

"Ye are the salt of the earth : but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted ? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men." Matt. v. 13.—
See also Lev. ii. 13. 2 Kings ii. 20. Mark ix. 40.

SALT is remarkable for its own peculiar savour, by which its presence in any substance with which it can unite itself is at once detected. It spreads itself through any substance with which it is thus mixed, and imparts its own quality of saltiness to the previous taste or savour. It has also the quality of preserving from corruption, even for a number of years, many substances that would otherwise perish ; so that it has often been considered an emblem of what is enduring or perpetual.

Our Blessed Saviour has told us, that His disciples are "the salt of the earth." By using this figure He seems to intimate that they must be distinguished from the world around them by some positive and peculiar character, just as salt is distinguished from other substances by its own quality of saltness. The character by which Christians are distinguished from those who are only nominally Christians, or from such as are altogether unconverted, is the character of holiness, which seasons or gives a savour to all their thoughts, words, and deeds. Thus it is said, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt³." And under the law of Moses salt was mixed with all the sacrifices; to signify, perhaps, that sincerity and uncorruptness of mind with which we should present ourselves, our souls and bodies, whatever we are, and whatever we have, to the service of God.

And our Saviour probably meant farther to intimate, that true religion is to spread from one soul to another; and, also, that it is the means of preserving the world from those judgments for which it would otherwise be ripe. As God would have spared Sodom had there been ten righteous within it⁴; or as He did save from the waves not only St. Paul, but, for his sake, all those also who were with him in the ship⁵; so it may be that many a country is spared the judgments that fall on others, for the sake of the true worshippers by whom it is blessed; and that the world itself is spared for a season for the sake of the elect people of God.

May I have grace to examine whether there is in me this positive and distinguishing character, by which a Christian is known, in God's sight, from others, as salt is known by its saltness: and whether it pervades my own thoughts, and words, and deeds, so as to imbue them all with a Divine savour of grace, and holiness, which they would not have by nature;

³ Col. iv. 6.

⁴ Gen. xviii. 32.

⁵ Acts xxvii. 24.

and to spread from me to others! Let me reflect that as a wicked man contributes to draw down the judgments of God upon his country ; and is thus an enemy to all around him, as well as to himself; so, by living a life acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, I may in some humble measure contribute to procure His favour for my country, and thus be not only blessed myself, but a blessing to others. And as salt may lose its saltness, by exposure, or time, and then is absolutely worthless, so let me remember the danger of declining from the ways of God, and losing the grace which He has given. Let me also remember, that to be a Christian in name only, and not in reality, can neither bring glory to God, nor good to myself, or my fellow-creatures.

XLVIII.—WIND AN EMBLEM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” John iii. 8.—See also Cant. iv. 16. Acts ii. 2.

WE see not the wind itself, but we see what it does; whether when the forest is bowed by some mighty tempest, or when the corn waves under the gentle breeze, and the flowers of the garden give out their fragrance, as they tremble at its softest touch.

It is thus with God's Holy Spirit. It is mysterious in its coming, and in its influence. Unseen itself, it is seen in its effects. The mighty change which the world has undergone, since first the doctrine of the cross was preached by peasants of Judea, with no human aid to support them, is the work of the unseen but ever-present Spirit; by which the false philosophies, and vain superstitions, of heathenism have fallen before the truth, as Dagon before the ark⁶ And whenever we see some hardened sinner c

⁶ 1 Sam. v. 3.

vinced, and humbled; some lawless wanderer sitting at the feet of Jesus, and in his right mind; some mourner comforted; some weak child of fallen man enabled to bear his cross, and follow Christ in the ways of patience, humility, and charity; in these and other similar instances we have evidence before us that the same Almighty Being is visiting His people; and by His gentler or His more powerful influence is opening the mind for that entrance of religious truth which giveth wisdom to the simple. It was perhaps because the wind is thus so suitable an emblem of the Spirit of God, that when He first came down on the day of Pentecost, there was heard the sound as of a rushing, mighty wind; and it filled the house where they were sitting. Breathe evermore, O Lord, upon my dark and sinful heart. By the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, grant that I may perfectly love Thee, and worthily magnify Thy Name. As Thou didst move upon the face of the waters⁷, to quicken into being what was without form and void, so may Thy godly motions stir my dull heart into life and energy! Awaken my repentance, increase my faith, confirm my hope, inflame my love. And do Thou so move upon the restless waves of this troublesome world, that at length the knowledge of Thy glory may cover the earth as the waters cover the sea!

⁷ Gen. i. 2.

**XLIX.—THE PRECIOUS OINTMENT, AND THE DEW
OF HERMON.**

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.” Psalm cxxxiii.—See also Exod. xxx. 25. 30. 1 Cor. xii. 13.

THE oil with which Aaron was anointed, was probably an emblem of the grace of God, by which he was chosen to his sacred office, and endued with such heavenly gifts as might enable him to discharge it. He was himself a type of that gracious Saviour, who is said to have been anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows⁸; and in whose name of “Christ,” that is to say, Anointed, we have thus a pledge that He was called of God⁹ to the priestly office, and abundantly qualified for the work of power and mercy which He undertook in our behalf.

The inspired Psalmist was enabled to see a farther Divine similitude in the anointing by which Aaron was thus consecrated to this priesthood. Reflecting how the costly ointment flowed over his whole person, and went down even to the skirts of his garments, he perceived an emblem of unity among brethren, whether as dwelling together in one family, or as knit together by fellowship in the same country, or as made one by communion in the same Church. It is thus that, when the members of a family, or a Church, or a nation, “dwell together in unity,” the Divine blessing seems to flow upon the head and all the members; and the happiness which results from love, and peace, and order, is ever diffusing itself from the parent, or ruler, to the very humblest of the subjects, or children. Nor does the blessedness confine itself to the Church, or

⁸ Ps. xlv. 7.

⁹ Heb. v. 4, 5.

family that is thus at unity in itself¹; but, like the fragrance of ointment poured forth, it so spreads itself abroad as to communicate the same endearing happiness to others. Our blessed Lord seems to have prayed for the unity of His people, as a token of the truth of His religion, that would carry conviction to the world around: "That they may be one," He says, "even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me²." The curse of Babel was division; but unity is one of the chief gifts and graces of that Divine Spirit, who, with the Father and the Son, is One God blessed for ever. Amen. "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all³."

The dew which fell upon the hill of Hermon, and thence descended to the lower heights of Zion, and the valleys from which it rose, suggested to the Psalmist's thoughts the same similitude which he perceived in the anointing oil⁴. As in the case of the precious ointment, the dew presents to the mind an image of the Divine blessing descending first upon the highest, and thence flowing downwards even to the lowest members of the body; and both images intimate that the blessing of unity is the source of holiness, and usefulness, wherever it prevails. The Church was designed to be a miracle of unity in the world; and it is in great measure owing to our unhappy divisions, that the progress of Divine truth has been so greatly hindered, and is still so slow. An unruly spirit, a love of pre-eminence, an unwillingness to receive with meekness the truths

¹ Ps. cxvii. 3.² John xvii. 22, 23.³ Eph. iv. 4—6.⁴ See Bishop Horne's Commentary on this Psalm.

and precepts of the Word of God, and to remember our own littleness, and unworthiness; these are the great causes of divisions in families, and of schisms and quarrels in the Church, and state. May I have grace to watch against any dispositions of this kind in my heart. May I know my own place, and acknowledge, with meekness, and respect, the place of others; and while I pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and for concord and harmony among brethren, let me endeavour, in my family, or in my Church and nation, to diffuse around me the heavenly fragrance of peace and concord; "avoiding every needless cause of contention, and endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

L.—THE RICH JEWELS; OR, SPECIAL TREASURE.

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." Mal. iii. 16, 17. (See Margin.)—See also Isa. lxii. 3.

WITH what care and diligence does the collector of precious stones pursue his calling! How anxious is he that, in casting away such stones as to an un instructed eye have an unpromising character, he may not incautiously discard some jewel of great price! and when he has found some stone of unquestionable worth, and beauty, how carefully does he lay it up among his "special treasure!" Our blessed Saviour has taught us, in more than one parable, that the blessings of his kingdom are like some treasures of this kind⁵; and has intimated that, in seeking those blessings, we should learn a lesson of zeal, and patience, from such as make it their business to seek for goodly pearls, or other earthly treasures. God has been further pleased

⁵ Matt. xiii. 44, 45.

to teach us that the value which is set upon those bright and costly gems, is an emblem of the value which He sets upon such as are truly His saints and servants. He notices every such precious stone, however unpromising in human judgment may be its outward appearance; however mean and lowly it may seem in the eyes of those who do not understand its value: He guards it for Himself; and a day is coming when He will "make up His jewels."

It is a blessed thought, that He sees the true tokens of these precious jewels under many a lowly form, and in places where we should hardly think of looking for them. Wherever there is the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit⁶; wherever a testimony is borne for His truth in an evil world, and upright hearts hold communion with Him, and with each other, in speaking of His endless mercy, and of their own most blessed hopes; He sees what is of great price in His sight; and what He will one day cause to shine even in the place of His sanctuary⁷.

It should be our first and great endeavour to become such as God may account His special treasure. Too many seem, among men, to shine like costly stones, whose real character is found to be false and brittle, when brought to the touchstone of trial. They are conspicuous for a time, but they have no true delight in communion with God, nor in speaking of Him one to another, as is ever the case with such as He brings up in His stedfast fear and love: and thus, when God makes up His jewels, they will not be reckoned among the number. How dreadful would it be to be cast from that treasure of God Himself, as unworthy of a place in it!

⁶ 1 Pet. iii. 4.

⁷ Isa. lx. 13.

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